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THE
GHOST
GIRL



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by
Edgar Saltus



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I

THE vivid climax to Nelly Chilton's wedding startled a metropolis long since used to the startling. But the spectacular termination of the beauty's marriage was commonplace by comparison to incidents that supervened.

In Bil Sayers' novel, "The Halls of Eblis," many of these incidents are told. The telling is the admirable work of an admirable writer. Events are set forth, not as they did occur, but as they should have occurred, which is the only way to tell a story. In the present document that process has been reversed.

Among those who stood witness to the events were Jim Bradish and your servant. He and I had been classmates at Harvard, fellow students in foreign universities, companions in the proscenia and side-scenes of life. We had travelled, feasted and starved together. I may say I knew him, that is if one human being ever does know another. While in Japan a cable caught us. His father was dead. Bradish was a very rich man.

At the time, I had, or thought I had, enough to go around, a bundle of bonds with which the trustee was diverting himself. When Bradish and I reached New York he was a plutocrat and I was a pauper. I hate the alliteration. More hateful still was the fact.

I have been about a bit and I know of no place

where poverty is agreeable, or any place anywhere where it is less agreeable than in New York. Along the glittering precinct in which my people had moved, I was like the man who fell from the balloon, simply out of it. But not irremediably. Bradish did the obvious thing. He did not ask, he insisted on being my banker.

It would, I dare say, seem very fine of me if I had balked. I did nothing of the kind. I drew on him for what little I actually required. In two years I was afloat. A year later he was repaid. I was what is termed a best-seller. Nothing to boast of, quite the contrary.

Meanwhile the glittering precinct was closed to Bradish also, though, necessarily, not as it was to me. I lacked the money to walk in. He lacked the courage.

In looking back at it all now, I realise what I did not recognise then. In a previous life he must have done something very evil. What he had done only the keepers of the doors that close behind our birth could tell. But whatever it may have been, he paid for it. I have seen and, what is worse I have seen him see, people shrink back open-mouthed from before him. Karma had plastered his face with a birthmark shaped and coloured like a great scarlet spider. In spite of which he had the gentleness of a giant. After the lovable fashion of a sundial, it was only serene hours of which he took count. In unphilosophic New York that is always a feat. It is one, though, which presently he ceased to perform.

Meanwhile, I had pitched my tent in that loveliness that Harlem is. The tent was on the top floor of what is agreeably known as a walkup. Bradish hated it.

But he came there. I told him not to come. I told him I did not want him. I told him I did not want anybody. Idle tears. Up the interminable stairs he stalked and pounded and pounded, threatening to break the door down. When, cursing the interruption, I threw it open, in he would tumble, followed, as often as not, by Mike, one of his many servants, a mechanic usually bowed to the ground with a hamper of aspic and game, wine and strong waters.

In those days I was so out of it that I knew nothing except what I invented. But in Bradish's great, white, staring house, there were always men to dinner, to supper, to breakfast, for all I know to the contrary, and the talk of these men, who knew what was going on, and a lot that was not, he retailed to me and it was all so much fresh air. Again and again it supplied a situation, the slang of the day, the prompt retort.

I can see him now, sitting back, drinking his cigar, drinking, too, his strong waters and, in the orange light of my low lamp, that spider barely visible. Usually a dull brick it was only in moments of excitement that it reddened. It seemed then a living thing. There have been times when I could have sworn I saw it extending and contracting its antennæ. There have been others when it seemed about to spring. That, though, was later.

One night—it was in the third year after our return to this country—and on a night when it was snowing like the very devil, I heard the usual uproar. It was the only way that he, or anyone else for that matter, could get at me. There was no telephone. I had had the accursed thing removed. Moreover it was idle to ring, in addition to being hazardous. Touch the but-

ton and you get a shock. I had had a battery put in for that purpose. To lead a profitable life of crime requires silence, solitude and a natural gift for villainy. By this time, that gift and those fortifications aiding, I was afloat, all sales flying, if I may be permitted a stupid jest, one which, together with everything else concerning myself, I throw in to be rid of. This is not a biography, heaven forbid. It is the account of a door, closed and barred, and not mine either.

On this night, for the first time, I approached it. It was wide open, so wide that all I saw were the vistas beyond. It was not until later that I realised that there was a door there, a door that was to shut itself, shut tighter than a wall.

The night was vile. There was a wind to blow your head off and I thanked fortune that I had had the forethought, which I often lacked, to larder up beforehand, when I heard Bradish hammering and reviling me outside.

Superbly befurred, in a coat which even a tenor might have denied himself, but, the coat apart, dressed as he usually was, with that appearance of the threadbare which, in a man of large means, is always superiorly correct, he stamped in, kicking and throwing the snow off on me and, once in my workshop, removing the coat which he dropped on the floor.

Then, puffing a bit, he greeted me.

"You live like a bandit."

On one of my few chairs I sat down and looked at him.

"What do you want?"

"More than I can get. More than I deserve if I could get it."

"Here," I said, "don't run into excesses. The liquor is behind you."

He waved at me. "You remember the ships crowded in Aulis like white birds?"

I took it in and handed it back. "But not the face that crowded them there. I never saw the lady and I doubt that anyone else did. It all happened a long time ago and probably never happened at all. Anyway, beauty since then has departed. Successively women became handsome, good-looking, pretty. Now they think it smart to be plain."

It was a long speech and I lit a cigarette.

He fidgeted about and lit one also. "You would not have said that this afternoon." Informatively he continued: "Aphrodite never existed——"

"Good Lord! I thought it was Helen you were talking of."

"But she exists today."

"Well, I am sure Swinburne would be glad to know it. What is her present style and title?"

Negligently he strewed the ashes. "Miss Chilton."

"Oh!" I said longly, for even in my Harlem fastness the rumour of her beauty had reached me. "How did you swim into her galley?"

"Brevoort brought her to see some etchings."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing."

"Very well-bred of her. See here! The original Chilton was a patroon, was he not? Or no, he could not have been. A lord of the manor, that's it. There is a Chilton Manor somewhere up the Hudson. Didn't she say anything?"

"It was her mother who did the talking. I asked them to dinner tomorrow. You have got to come."

Well, why not? I thought, for the turpitude on which I had been engaged was done and I said: "Send a car for me."

To my knowledge he had six cars, which is only reasonable, and he may have had more, which is not. None the less he rebuked me.

"You act like a prima donna."

But he sent the car and I went.

The drawing-room, huge, high-ceiled, frescoed, fitted in yellow and black, was unusually bare, to the foot that is, and I wondered at it. At one end, fronting windows that gave on upper Fifth Avenue, were two rows of chairs. At them also I wondered.

"A camp-meeting?" I said to Mrs. Trefusis, born a Bradish, who was there with her daughter. The latter, a prim *débutante* who could throw a cartwheel without displaying much of her subsurface garments.

Additionally were Brevoort, a gay sort of ass; his sister, Hilaria Vaux, who was gayer; other topnotchers, and Cally, a physician, whom we called Cagliostro—a pleasantry which secretly he liked and openly resented. The best of us have our weaknesses. But as yet not the Chiltons.

Finally they came.

Bradish introduced me. "This is Chandos Poole."

Mrs. Chilton gave me her hand. A tall woman, admirably sent out, she had an easy way, which I fancied could be very repellent, and eyes flat as a snake's. Those eyes darted.

"I knew your mother." She turned to her daughter.

"Darling, you have heard me speak of dear Mrs. Poole?"

Probably the girl never had, though what she replied and whether she replied, I have forgotten. I was thinking of the ships crowded at Aulis, one of which instantly floated me to Paphos where I stood before Aphrodite when young and a girl.

Nelly Chilton had the low Greek brow, the ineffable Greek nose, lips lifted at the corners by the upturned comma of the Athenian mouth, buttercup hair, an apple-blossom skin and cornflower eyes. She seemed to have gems about her, not that she needed them or had them, but their glow was there and, with it, a charm that was overwhelming. Many a man would have paid through the nose to be allowed just to stand and look at her.

Aristotle, asked what beauty is, dodged it and said, "A question for the blind." I am not blind and I knew that I stood before it. It is a rare sensation. Only once had I experienced it quite so amply and that was when considering—through fieldglasses—a landscape of lilies and tigers.

But at once we went on and in to what I thought a very ordinary dinner, a sort of *pot-au-feu* with wings to it. The wings were ortolans, though where and how the caitiff of a chef had obtained them, I afterward forgot to ask.

The room, a sort of baronial hall, extended up through two storeys. Midway, it was circled by a gallery from which other rooms abutted and from which arrased tapestries hung.

I never cared for it, but I preferred it to the dinner which, in addition to being ordinary, was dull. If it had

not been for Cally, it would have been deadly. Occasionally, Brevoort flared a little and then like a damp pinwheel went out. On one side I had the Trefusis girl.

Primly she remarked: "Must be jolly to write and do what you like to the heroines. Don't you find it nice and easy?"

I threw one of my own cartwheels. "Well, hardly. This morning I wrote a line. This afternoon I scratched it out. I am quite exhausted."

Up a bit, on the opposite side, was Miss Chilton. I saw her laughing at something Cally had said. Any emotion is unbecoming. True beauty is austere. Yet her laughter heightened hers. It did not deform, it humanised. It lifted her from mythology and set her down before you an unspoiled, unaffected girl.

From her I looked at her mother who was talking to Bradish, no, at him. After the manner of a woman of her *monde* and her years, she was considerably made up. Behind the paint and the slight contractions at her eyes and mouth, I could see her also, a soul disillusioned, hungry, fatigued, indomitable—a soul common enough, the soul of a woman at odds with fate and determined to outwit it.

Voicelessly I said to my neighbour, "Is Mrs. Chilton a widow?"

"He took his hat and umbrella and no one has seen him since."

Sensible man, I reflected.

At the moment, from across the table, Brevoort called at Miss Chilton.

"If you were not yourself, who would you dislike to be?"

"But that is just it," she answered. "We aren't any of us ourselves. We are all of us masked and it is that I dislike. I don't want a disguise, I want to be Me."

She spoke with little pauses in a husky Mayfair voice that was singularly fetching. At the time that was all I noticed, except that Bradish, who had been literally hanging on her words, looked as though he could jump straight down the throat from which they came.

That is all I noticed. But there is a Russian saying to the effect that life is a dark room in which we are shut in with an enemy—the eternal enemy that we have within us—and from whom we have to fight free. Afterward I recalled that saying and wondered whether she knew it and had been translating it for us. Yet how dark that dark room of hers was to become she could not have known. None of us knew. But even then its shadows were groping for her. At the glittering table, in the great lighted hall, more particularly perhaps in the brilliance of her incredible beauty, no one could see them. Yet, stealthy, ominous, relentless, they were reaching for her, reaching, too, for Bradish, stretching out to cover them both, to shroud them, to hide them away.

Then, at once, everybody was getting up.

Now, though, in the drawing-room, the chairs that fronted the windows were occupied by people, very sumptuous all of them, and all convulsed by some private joke.

For all I knew they might have been the pick of the social basket. Yet, suddenly, pushing back the chairs, there they were clapping and singing, kicking up before

and behind, while one of them, a ravishing little animal, tiptoed out on the bare floor and danced.

The singing sank. At the piano was a fat lady. Still the girl danced, not acrobatically as I believe the fashion was then, but with what I imagined might be the fabled art of Taglioni. Presently, with a backward gesture at her spangled skirt, she stopped and bowed. On her forehead, one drop of perspiration glistened.

I did not see her again for a little and meanwhile a man, with a lot of hair and an affable manner, asked me for my hat, hoped I had not been careless enough to lose it, borrowed Brevoort's handkerchief, a square of folded linen, from which he shook out a shower of orchids that drenched Miss Chilton.

Then, at once, the other sumptuous people treated us to a farce, of which the fun was so good and so quick that some of us roared and Miss Chilton laughed.

I could see her at it and I thought she should never do anything else, except smile. For a while thereafter smile she did, no doubt, and often I dare say, if only for the mere civility of it, but when that little while had passed I never saw her smile again.

Presently there was a frisk and afterward there was supper. During the frisk, I delighted myself, and I hope the fat lady, by two-stepping with her. Bradish orang-outangoed with the little ballerina. But, good chap that he was, he put me beside her at supper, a real old-fashioned orgy, at which we all drank too much, except the Chiltons and the Trefusis, who long since had gone, the prim débutante showing off to the delighted Rialtians a tiptop cartwheel as she went.

How young we were then! How young and how mad!

II

BEFORE me, the next evening, were the galleys of my latest crime. However iniquitous the copy, the proofs were worse. They were larded with microscopic felonies which required the eyes of a bug and the patience of a philosopher to detect, yes, and with the certainty of defeat in the end—yet I was attempting to correct them.

All at once the ink shook all over it. An earthquake had jarred my elbow. There was Bradish again.

When I opened, there was Cally also.

With my usual courtesy I greeted them. "*Entrez, canailles.*"

In mitigation, Bradish gestured. "He picked me up in the street."

"Misfortunes never come singly," I resignedly replied. "They come single file and ask for a drink."

"For two of 'em," said Cally. "I have been dining at Duncan's. After dinner he danced a *pas seul*."

"For you?"

We were then in the workshop where I got out spirits which I knew water would dampen.

Cally helped himself abundantly.

"Some time since, Duncan called me in. He could not walk. He could shuffle a bit and even that hurt. Why, he did not know. No one knew. He had had the indicated tests which indicated nothing. He told me all about it, told it endlessly. I said: 'Do as I tell you and in six months you will dance.' Tonight, the six months were up. He danced. He danced on the dinner-table and broke it down. Pass the bottle."

"What did you prescribe, Cagliostro?"

"The dentist. I told him to have his teeth out, every one of them."

"And then robbed him!" I enviously exclaimed. "Lord! If instead of a hackman I were only a physician! It is true I have bankrupted a lot of people and I hope to bankrupt more. But I do it in cold ink. You do it in cold blood."

Cally nodded. "You are having a good time, aren't you?" Philosophically he added, "Well, we all had one last night."

He turned to Bradish. "In spite of the charm of one of your guests, I have held, and still hold, that beauty is a survival."

Blandly he turned to me. "Where is your telephone?"

"Down stairs, around the corner, two streets up, across the way, at the undertaker's."

Bradish lit another cigarette. "Did you ever hear of such a chap?"

"Genius is always eccentric," Cally quite as blandly replied.

He was bland. With a pointed beard, eyebrows that were a bit upturned and a beak of a nose, he had all the blandness of Mephistopheles.

At that beard he plucked. Then putting on his hat, out he went.

The door had not closed before Bradish was at me.

"The Chiltons are coming to supper. They are at the opera now with Mrs. Amsterdam. I told them to fetch her and that I would fetch you. You will like Mrs. Amsterdam. Or rather she will like you. She is very keen on good-looking young bloods."

"Go to the devil!" I retorted. "Good Lord! Mrs.

Amsterdam! I remember her when I was a little shaver. Why, I have sat in her lap."

"Have you? Well, don't remind her of that if she sits in yours. Now run along and dress."

I put the proofsheets before him. "While I am at it, here is some rot for you."

Bradish laughed. "You're the most hospitable chap I ever knew."

When I returned, he was looking at something else, at a mental vision of Nelly Chilton, I think, for as I entered he gave a sort of start.

It is years since then, but often I have thought how differently it might have fared with him and how differently it would have fared with her, could his vision have been clairvoyant. Yet, in that, I am probably in error. Probably, whatever the future holds for us is pre-written in our progression. None the less, I cannot but feel that all would have been changed, his life and her life, if for but a moment's space he could have beheld the halls that were waiting for him then. Hung with enigmas, tapestried with tears, Bil Sayers called them the Halls of Eblis, which, I believe, is Arabic for hell. If he could have seen them, and the "if" is enormous, he might have outwitted fate.

"Comeonski," I said, an invitation which we had acquired in Moscow.

He got at his watch. Thin as a wafer, it was always wrong.

"Yes, let's hurry. I hope Cally has not taken the car."

There were cabs in Harlem then, except when you wanted one and below, in the street, the spectacle of Mike hugging himself to keep warm, was comforting.

"Home," Bradish told him, "and never mind the speed law."

Whether or not Mike minded the law is perhaps unimportant, but just as we were approaching that home a fire-engine burst on the avenue like a typhoon. Incidentally a taxi was dodging it and against that taxi another car banged.

Already Mike had hopped off. Adjacently great doors had opened. Two servants, one with the face of a wooden mask and the other with the tread of a cat, hurried down. From the first taxi two women alighted; from the second a man. The typhoon had flown afar, chased by another.

But now we were all on the sidewalk, Bradish and I, Mike, the servants, the women, the man and two highly abusive mechanics. How they pacified themselves is not a part of this document. The women, furred to the eyes, were unrecognisable; to me, that is, but not to Bradish, nor yet to the other man whose face appeared to be cut.

Bradish, meanwhile, was doing the honours of the pavement to the women, whom also the injured man addressed, and I saw one of them give him her hand, while the other affected to be unaware that he was about.

Bradish called at the wooden mask. "Peters, show the ladies in." He called at the catman. "Gedney, see to their wraps." He turned to the wounded. "You must not bleed to death. Come in with me and we will apply first aid. My name is Bradish. I see you know my guests."

"They are relatives of mine," lightly the wounded

man answered. "My name is Austen. But I have only a scratch. Just as many thanks to you though."

As he spoke, he held his hat on with one hand and with the other patted his face.

Without lingering to hear more, I went on and up the steps, beyond which events were lurking, as they do lurk, until they are ready for us, though without waiting until we are ready for them, which only the sage ever is. Yet, as I look back now, I can see that even then they were gathering, prepared to pounce.

In the yellow and black room I found the Chiltons, found too that I was in no immediate danger. Mrs. Amsterdam was not there.

"Is he coming in?" Miss Chilton asked.

Without knowing to whom she referred, I told her of course he was.

"It is strange," the beauty continued. "I am fated to be in an accident. It is in my horoscope. But it is very wrong to believe in that. The Church forbids it. It is among the secret things and secret things, the Bible teaches, belong only to the Lord."

In speaking, she crossed herself.

I was profoundly astonished but I hope I did not show it.

"None the less," she continued, "when I saw that great mad thing rushing at us, I——"

"The typhoon you mean?" I put in.

"Typhoon! What typhoon?" Mrs Chilton surprisedly called at me.

But Bradish was effecting his entrance, and she turned to him.

"Sorry about Laura Amsterdam. She threw us over."

"The point is," Bradish with some gallantry replied, "that you are here and shortly your relative will be."

"Relative!" Mrs. Chilton, in the same surprised manner, exclaimed. "What relative?"

Bradish motioned. "A Mr. Austen who is slowly recovering from a wound that might have been mortal."

Mrs. Chilton motioned also. The gesture, though slight, contrived to be emphatic. It reduced any relationship to nothingness.

"Nonsense! Some of our people were related ages ago. If it comes to that, everybody is related to everybody."

Now though, in the wide doorway, he too appeared. The spaciousness framed him, disclosing the portrait of a man young, tall, virile, abominably good-looking, with an air curiously and attractively insolent. From his face the blood had gone. A strip of court-plaster replaced it.

"Aunt Mary," he leisurely remarked at Mrs. Chilton. "If that brute of a taximan of mine jarred you ever so little, you know I regret it."

What a crammer, I thought. For it was not regret that his face expressed, it was impudence. It was as though he were telling her: "See here now, I am, and shall be, one too many for you."

But as I am not writing fiction I may admit that that interpretation came to me not then but later when I thought it over. Yet though I still think the interpretation correct, I know he was wrong. He was not one too many for her. She was one too many for him. Yes, and fate was too many for both.

Meanwhile we had all gone in to supper. Bradish had Mrs. Chilton at his right, and, at his left, the

beauty, next to whom Austen succeeded in seating himself.

I sat next to Mrs. Chilton who thoughtfully and generally remarked:

"It is too bad about Laura Amsterdam. She would have made the table even."

But she meant that it was too bad about Austen. Without him the table would have been evener.

I took that in with some pheasant that had been cooked, with oranges and almonds, in madeira and tea, and though that of course is the only way that a pheasant could be cooked, yet I felt that the caitiff below stairs was improving.

While I was savouring it, I glanced over at the beauty who was talking to Austen. At the moment she again suggested Aphrodite and I marvelled at this paradox in flesh and blood who looked like a pagan goddess and talked like a mediæval saint. Yet though the mythological quality persisted, it seemed sublimated then by something else, by just what I could not immediately determine, but in a moment I did. In her eyes there was a glow, in her voice a caress and it seemed to me that the beauty was in love, profoundly in love I imagined, and I wondered with whom.

When, finally, I nailed the lucky devil, it was without any applause for my own acumen.

"You do nothing but eat," Bradish threw at me.

"Yes," I threw back. "But I think when I eat and just now I was thinking of an ideal repast which we once enjoyed and which was composed of chrysanthemum soup and the maxims of Confucius."

"And dolphin, too," Bradish put in. "Don't forget the dolphin!"

"I never heard of such a thing." Mrs. Chilton resuming her surprised manner, exclaimed. "A dolphin! How was it cooked?"

"With various sauces and condiments," I told her. "You know the adage—Sweet are the juices of diversity?"

"No," she determinedly replied. "I do not know the adage and now that I have heard it, I dislike it extremely."

"Yes," said Bradish. "It is very painful."

But I did not propose to be snubbed and I took it up again.

"Everything that has to do with eating is painful. Eating takes away your appetite. I have always loved the bishop who said: 'God bless our home and damn our cook.' "

"But not Mr. Bradish's cook," Mrs. Chilton, with the same determination, retorted. "Last night the dinner was perfect and tonight the supper is *plus que parfait*. Darling!"

She looked at her daughter and turned to Bradish. "We must be going."

She added something which I did not hear. Then she repeated it. "Darling!"

Presently, when they were again furred to the eyes, and we were putting them in Bradish's car, I could not see Mrs. Chilton's face, though I would have given a dollar for the privilege. Unrebuffably Austen got in with them.

It was some time before I saw him again or the Chiltons either. When I did see them, a door was closing and beyond was a sphinx.

III

It must have been after two when, again in Harlem, I went up the interminable stairs. On the way I was thinking of that girl and her undreamed-of beauty. As I began at the fifth, I saw what I took to be an old woman huddled on the landing opposite my door. But, as I advanced, she stood up. I saw then she was not old but young and, immediately, as I approached her, I could not help it, I started and nearly slipped. Then I raised my hat. It was Nelly Chilton!

Why was she there? How had she come? What did she want? And where had she got a hat and where had she changed her furs? Where, for that matter, had she changed her expression? At supper it had been alluring. Now it was reserved.

My bewilderment must have been very manifest. In any event, at once she spoke. With an intonation, slightly foreign, she said something.

I heard, but I did not hear understandingly. That also she must have seen. She spoke again.

"Could you, without inconvenience, loan me a chair?"

I did get that and inanely I parroted it.

"A chair?"

She indicated an adjoining door. "I have lost my key. Until morning I am a vagrant."

And an exotic, I thought, for already I had recognised my mistake.

"You are quite right."

That is what she said and I started again.

"About what?" But, rallying, I resumed; "I have five chairs, I have even six, but the sixth is broken. You shall have whatever displeases you least."

I opened my door, switched the light in the hall and turned to her.

She entered and followed me into the workshop where I again switched a light.

As I looked at her then, she sniffed, much as a terrier will, and catalogued me.

"You are a literary man."

"No, I write for the magazines. There is nothing less literary than that. Will you try this chair?"

As I spoke, I looked again. In feature, in colouring, her resemblance to Nelly Chilton was curious. There it stopped. Similarly dressed and seen across a room, one could not have told them apart. A nearer view differentiated. Nelly Chilton looked like a goddess and talked like a saint. This young woman looked like a princess and, as I presently discovered, talked like a sibyl. The other girl's beauty was pagan. This girl's was noble. Otherwise, except in height and figure, not a pin to choose between them.

"We are not the same, are we? In the hall I saw you mistook me for her."

In private life, it was a bit weird.

Immediately she added: "Miss Chilton and I move in different spheres, but recently I came in contact with her. We both noticed the resemblance. It seemed to amuse her."

"Well, I'll be shot!" I exclaimed. "Certainly you are very gifted."

"Unfortunately gifted," she corrected. "Telepathy has its disadvantages."

"And its compensations."

"Occasionally, as in the present instance. I know

I can say that, for I know also you will not misconstrue it."

In speaking, she removed a glove. There are hands that are spiritual, hands that are coarse. There are philistine hands and hands that are artistic. I saw her fingers, long, tapering, and I chanced it.

"You are an artist."

"My hand is tell-tale, is it not? Yet the tales it tells are not quite true. For the moment, I am associated with a firm of interior decorators. It was there I saw Miss Chilton. But I am intruding. Perhaps you will help me with a chair."

As she moved toward one, I saw that she was simply and admirably dressed, dressed with an originality that is nowhere on sale.

"The landing is a bit bleak," I told her. "Why not make a morning of it?"

Momentarily she seemed to consider it. Then, like a good fellow, she removed her wrap and sat down.

I gave her my name and she gave me hers. It was Bolton, Aly Bolton.

At the combination I exclaimed and she said her father was English and her mother Russian. Both were dead. In outline she sketched her life. It was a very cobwebby outline. In exchange I gave her odds and ends from my own career. After which we got back at the beginning. She spoke again of Miss Chilton and I asked what she thought of her.

"Only the obvious things. She is a little obvious, is she not? But——"

She had hesitated and it trailed away.

I prodded her. "But what?"

Then it appeared she could "see," as that psychic

term is used, and had "seen" since she was a child, when it perplexed and annoyed her parents. She had a brother who died. Afterward she played with him. Once, when he was in a chair her father sat on him. She screamed and hit her father and he punished her for it. After that, the talent was hid in a bushel. Since then it had diminished. But she could still "see," at least a little.

So she explained and I asked what she saw in Miss Chilton.

"In her? It would be hard to say. But, about her, I saw darkness, thick darkness and a light beyond."

"How did you see that? I mean how does anything of the kind come to you?"

"Very much as though I were looking through the wrong end of the opera-glass."

"And how do you interpret darkness?"

"It's a symbol. It means illness, misfortune, death."

I sat back. "Yes and, with the light beyond, the symbol is clear. 'Life is death in a land of darkness. Death is life in a land of light.'"

"Very beautiful," she said, "and probably true. Whose is it?"

"It is from the song of the singer going out from Amenti."

"Amenti?"

"The Egyptian purgatory. There the disembodied were judged. If they had harmed no heart, if they had made no one weep, if they had not talked abundantly, if they had not been anxious, harpers took up the song, they were free. From the land of darkness they passed to the land of light."

From my recital of antique sins, she turned. I

could see her looking about, noting the absence of articles of virtue. Presently she said and I thought approvingly:

"You are clockless."

"Yes, and watchless also. Brain workers should be. Watches and clocks presuppose things to be done, appointments to be kept, amusements to be endured. They presuppose punctuality which is the thief of time."

She was good enough to agree with me.

From time we passed to space. We talked of everything in the universe, except Einstein's theory of it, which would have been premature. Altogether we talked for five hours. Never but once before had I talked so long to a woman and on that occasion I kept saying the same thing over and over again. Ultimately the sun leered in. It leered groggily, as though it had been making a night of it, and, asking her permission, I left the room, went out and around the corner, ferreted about, unearthed a locksmith, brought him back, set him to work and, with the key that he made, returned to her. Her arms were on the table, her head was in them, her hat on a chair. Sleep had sunk her in its deep lagoons.

In the street I had become a beast of burden, laden with crescents, unsalted butter, fruit, cream. These I took to the kitchenette—horrible word!—where I made coffee. While the pot was boiling I arranged a tray. To embellish the tray, I took from the back corner of the cupboard's top shelf a Sévres cup that had come down to me wrapped in tissue paper. Other things that had come with it had gone with the diverted bonds.

On that early morning, with the tray and in evening clothes, I must have looked like a waiter when, rising from those lagoons, she looked up.

The experience of awaking in the rooms of a stranger must, I thought, be a novelty to her and I wondered how she would act. Whatever she did would be so much copy.

But there she routed me. I had put that cup before her. She took it, held it, her head went back. She seemed to be considering the ceiling. But presently, "A large room. A man with a white beard. A little boy in blue. The old man is drinking from a cup. The little boy is showing him a wooden horse painted yellow "

From the ceiling, her eyes turned to me.

"This is the cup. Who are the people?"

Dumbfounded, I stared. What else could I do? For, as I told her, the old man was my grandfather and I the little boy. But this intimate demonstration of psychometry, which is the rarest and most curious of gifts, one that enables the gifted to tell from an object where the object has been and what occurred there, this miracle astounded me and I told her that also.

She took it lightly, with a light smile. Then, at once, she presiding, we fell to. The promenade around the corner and back had converted me into a hyena. I ate enormously, growling a little, as I suppose hyenas do, yet only at my own forgetfulness. I had omitted to fetch flowers. But then, praise God, it was not every day that I breakfasted with a beautiful sibyl. It would have been too disturbing.

"You live alone?" I asked.

A few hours before I had thought her face noble and reserved. Over the coffee-pot it projected an interior radiance, a glow clear and defined as mother-of-pearl.

"No, not alone," she answered. "I have a friend, Signor Matouchi."

Some opera-singer, I thought.

"He has the most ferocious whiskers you ever saw," she added, "and he will be sure to bite me if I do not hurry."

"Oh!" I said, inanely relieved, for what business was it of mine? "Well, give him my love and perhaps you will let me add a saucer of cream."

She thanked me, gathered her hat and cloak, took the key, thanked me again.

I saw her to the door, where I gave her the cream and where I heard Signor Matouchi meow. After which, I went to bed, slept prodigiously and woke from dreams of a mime.

For days he had haunted me. I had wanted, if possible, to produce something less ordinary than ordinary fiction and I had thought of doing a pantomime and of calling it *The Chatterbox*, though, as I look back now, I think the title came first and the idea of a pantomime came later. What better title, I youthfully reflected, could a dumbshow have?

The galleys of my last iniquity out of the way, I got at it. Except to the amateur, the getting at anything of the kind is a form of labour hard as a bricklayer's, much more engrossing and far less useful. It held me with invisible threads that were firmer than rope. They bound and gagged me, rendering me, as the

opiates of creative dreams do render one, unfit for human companionship.

I did not forget the sibyl. Twice, in the hazards of hall and stairway, I saw and saluted her, but though indulgently she asked me, I did not return her visit. I did not forget Bradish, but I had other fish to fry. There were earthquakes. Hermetically I ignored them. *Que diable!* When I am not at home, I am out. Only a volcano could have erupted me.

Meanwhile, I dressed *The Chatterbox*. March went, April came. There were skies of silk, all the surprises and surrenders of spring, before I got up from it.

IV

THAT day, with a dozen violets in the lapel of a coat that still said Savile Row, I went junketing, not on Fifth Avenue, where the ornate used to stroll and where they stroll no longer, but to the east of upper Madison, wondering whether I might not happen on some flat less leprous than the walkup. Yet, as I look back now, I am sure the junket lacked conviction. Moving, the French say, is a little death. But in that sense all New Yorkers have their minor deceases and it was in trying to incline my heart that I wandered through thick streets, thin streets, streets of gloating windows, streets of obvious disquiet, streets of unaccountable beings, until finally, entering one that seemed pregnant with obscure calamities, I happened on a house that had a Leah-like air of desertion.

On it, a sign informed me that an apartment with all conveniences was to let and I was conjecturing these

conveniences when, from the entrance, Austen appeared.

Instantly he amazed me.

"I was just thinking of you."

I stood and looked at him. Soberly and admirably dressed, he was the portrait of Aramis in modern clothes.

"Are you busy?" he asked.

Brummel's retort slid from me. "'Ants and people in trade are busy. Never ask a gentleman that.'" He took it with great good nature.

"Come in and let me offer you a sherry and bitters."

I did not want his sherry and bitters. It was the sign and the conjectural conveniences that tempted me and I followed him up two flights to a landing where, through the open door of an empty flat, I beheld a scrubwoman.

Leah, I told myself.

Adjacent was a parallel flat into which he showed me and then into a room that had an air careless and insolent, a room that resembled him, except that it was less well-dressed. There was a sideboard, a table covered with a drooping green cloth, the usual chairs, a bookcase, a green sofa and a cupboard, wide open, in which coats were hanging, fur coats, motor coats, rain coats, top coats, coats for every season and, it may be, of every colour. He closed the door on them, rang, and at once, as though sprung from a trap, a civil-faced gnome appeared.

"Shall it be a cocktail? Or would you prefer——"

"A drop of Polly, if you have it," I told him.

"A bottle of Apollinaris," he said to the gnome who seemed to produce it at once.

"Look here, Poole," he continued as the servant disappeared, "I have been wanting to call on you but I could not discover where you live. You are a member of the Buck, aren't you? I stopped in there yesterday, and asked the doorkeeper. Of course, he would not tell me, but I thought, in asking, that I might find you there."

"The flat next door is to let, is it not?" I appropriately enquired.

"Yes, or rather no. It was to let but a man I know has taken it. Have a cigarette?"

We were seated at the table, across which he shoved a case. I helped myself and he got back at me.

"What I wanted to see you about is Bradish."

"Hello!" I exclaimed. "How is he? I have not seen him in a hundred years. What's wrong with him."

"He is too confoundedly rich."

"Yes," I said, "it is disgusting."

"He ought not to be roaming around loose. I want him to keep off the grass."

What grass he meant, I did not know, but the effrontery of it was beautiful and I said as much.

"Then why don't you tell him so?"

"There you are! If I did, he would be in a position to tell me to go to the devil and I would have to swallow it. You know Mrs. Chilton?"

I drank the Polly. "Well enough to bow if she bowed first."

"Here it is then. She wants to make a match between him and her daughter and——"

"I don't see that that is any business of ours."

"It is my business at any rate and as a friend of his I think it is yours."

"Well," I said, "perhaps it is your business. You are a relative, aren't you?"

"A good lot more than that. I have known Miss Chilton ever since she was a little girl. I am about the only man she can turn to and——"

He looked away.

Everybody likes to be confidential, if they can be so to someone who will accompany them on the harp. But for the harp there must be intimacy. Between Austen and myself there was none and I understood why he looked away.

"But," he at once resumed, "that is neither here nor there. The point is that Miss Chilton is interested in someone else and it seemed to me that if you would say a word——"

"Good Lord!" I interrupted. "You speak as though he were persecuting her. That is not Bradish."

"No. Certainly not. It is her mother. She is doing what she can to force her to take him and it is for that reason I thought you might——"

"Never in the world. It would not help in the least. On the contrary——"

"But see here——"

"You don't know Bradish. Any interference makes him mulish and I don't blame him. I can be mulish myself. If I had his money I would be a wilderness of mules. Great Scott! What is the use of being rich as all outdoors if you can't tell anybody and everybody to go to the devil."

"Precisely, and that is just what I want him to say to Mrs. Chilton. If he doesn't, look here, Poole, if he doesn't, he is going to regret it."

I laughed. "Is that a threat?"

"You misunderstand me. He is not the man for Miss Chilton. I don't mean because of his unfortunate appearance. If he were Phæbus Apollo it would be quite the same. He does not appeal to her, not in the least. But her mother is so jockeying her that she may run her into it. In that case what sort of an existence can he expect to lead."

"He hasn't told me."

"Isn't it obvious though? I may be in error, but I'll wager he is as material as they make 'em."

"So am I."

Gracefully he yielded it. "I fear I am also."

"Well then?"

"But Miss Chilton is just the opposite. Miss Chilton is as spiritual as he is the reverse."

For a cited beauty, a beauty of her type and headiness that, ordinarily, would have been a bit thick. Yet, I knew it to be true. In her face were raptures. There were lilies in her thoughts. But that did not help matters. Even otherwise the matter did not concern me and I got up to go.

He, too, got up.

"Put in a word, Poole. You will be doing him a good turn."

You mean I will be doing you one, I thought, for I saw through it then.

But he laughed or affected to laugh and added:

"I don't pretend to know Bradish, but I do know Mrs. Chilton and that is enough."

He said it as he went with me to the door, where he thanked me and saw me out.

On the landing Leah stood, a pail in one hand, a mop in the other.

As I went down the stair, I little dreamed in what curious and tragic circumstances I was to recall having seen her there. What occupied me was my lucky squeak. By not more than a hair I had missed having Austen for a neighbour. He would have been way-laying and buttonholing me till I died.

Yet, as I afterward recognised, it was fateful for him, and not only for him but for all concerned, that he had buttonholed me at all.

I made straight for Bradish's house.

V

SINCE then, in looking back, there have been moments when it seemed to me that that moment was pivotal, that of all that afterward happened I was then the direct agent. There have been other moments when it seemed to me that it must all have happened anyway. The latter view is the more reasonable, the former more ambitious. As yet, I have made no choice.

Even when the servant told me that Bradish was not at home, even then, if I had gone away, the course of events must have swerved, though it is probable that sooner or later they would have reassembled in their designed combination. The old idea of the spiderous fates that sit and spin is picturesque, as any allegory should be. But behind the curtain, forces which we ourselves have created, play on us and on our lives. The fates that sit and spin are our own fingers. The spell they cast is destiny self-made.

These views, certainly superficial, came to me long later. At the moment I had turned to go. Before me on the pavement a man passed and nodded. That

was the pivotal moment. The trivial incident arrested me and telling the servant I would wait I went on and in to the library.

Former Bradishes had been intensely respectable and equally dull. They were what, I believe, was called strict Presbyterians. Upstairs, in the rooms that extended from the gallery, some of their remains were covered with horsehair. In this room other remains survived—a severe carpet, a calvanistic table, stern bookshelves, straitlaced chairs. In a corner was the ugliest piece of statuary I ever saw. On the table was the biggest and ugliest inkpot ever made.

From a wall, Bradish's father looked down, very much, I suppose, as he had looked at these things when they all lived with him in Washington Square. Moreover, in an adjoining room, that gave on the street, were other felicities. The adjoining room, through which one had to pass to reach the library, was the real chamber of horrors. There Bradish received tiresome people, lawyers, agents and the like. Why, with all his wealth, he received them at all; why he stuck to the damning evidence of ancestral taste, these were mysteries from which I shrank.

But it was not all horror. On this day in that library I found an old friend who always had something new to say, in which he differed vastly from other people of my acquaintance. His name is Hugo's *Shakespeare*. The pages turn to the sound of trumpets, to the long parade of genius. The book is just what a book should be, perfectly impossible and equally exalting.

A moment and the pageantry took me. I was floating from height to height, from prophet to seer, hovering,

a lost soul, before thrones in the ideal, passing from Isaiah and Æschylus, up through the ages to Hugo himself. Then abruptly, a titan reached and hurled me. Shot through space I was on earth again, in a highly uncomfortable chair, facing the insults that fell.

"What a beast you are!"

I shied the book. Bradish caught it and sat down before me.

With the disposition of a sundial—over which clouds will pass—the spider, at that moment, made him, as in moments of excitement it often did make him, unaffectedly hideous. Familiarity breeds many things. Usually I did not notice. I could not help noticing it then. It seemed about to spring.

He motioned. "I have gone to you. I have sent. The janitor said you were dead. What sort of a chap are you?"

"A mere pilgrim. What's wrong?"

"I am in hell."

"Look out," I told him, and far better than I knew. "There is always a deeper one. How did you get there?"

He put the Hugo on the table.

"It's Miss Chilton."

"See here," I said. "An hour ago Austen had the cheek to say you must keep off the grass."

Bradish stared. "He has been at you, has he?"

"He got me in his rooms and used me as a sewer. It appears that if you don't look out you'll get let in."

He started. "I will, eh? By whom then?"

"Her mother. He said she would jockey you into a corner."

"Gammon! She is in a corner herself and a pretty tight one. The woman hasn't a penny."

"There's the Chilton place."

"Mortgaged. Blanketed up to the roof, even to the vault there."

"Vault? What vault?"

"In colonial days every manor had its own cemetery. The Chiltons have theirs."

He was becoming historical, wandering away from it and, glad of it, I let him run on, but he did not run far. In a moment he was back again.

"Her mother is afraid they'll bolt."

I hoped they would. I omitted to say so however. Instead, I became sympathetic.

"Jim, if this were a novel of mine, I would make the hero—you are the hero—show himself in such fine colours that the lady would jump down his throat."

"Yes, you would be sure to write just such rubbish."

Pausing, he smoothed the table, which was entirely unruffled.

"I have, I suppose, a dollar or two. I have also, I suppose, a year or two ahead of me. I would give them all, everything I can claim in this world, everything I may hope for in the next, if——"

He broke it off, but I followed it and I thought, isn't it wonderful how the illusion of happiness which the idea of union with another can create, will pack a sane man's head with insanities. He thinks himself wholly in love with this girl and what he loves is not the girl but his idea of her. Any girl that resembled her would do as well. At which, up before me, surged that sibyl. Nelly Chilton and Aly Bolton were alike as two roses.

Meanwhile, painfully he was at it. "It's my face."

"Nonsense," I told him and I meant it. For a woman must be loved, though it be by a monster, perhaps particularly by a monster, provided that what it is conventional to call her affections are not otherwise involved.

"Hasn't Austen anything?" I asked.

"Enough to pay his tailor."

There had been an hour when even that potentiality had seemed chimerical to me and I might have said as much but, at the moment, Peters announced that luncheon was served.

Bradish got up. "Comeonski."

I, too, got up and, preceding him, went through the chamber of horrors and crossed the hall where Peters was opening the front door. I passed on and had entered the drawing-room when I heard a man speaking rapidly, in English, but with the unmistakable accent of France.

"Mr. Bradish? I am fortunate to find you. Is this yours?"

I turned. The man's back was to the light. I could not see his face, but I could see Jim's. He was looking at a strip of paper which the man held out to him—and held on to also—and, in looking, his face had grown vicious. Usually very civil to everyone, but already out of temper and angered by the abrupt intrusion, not only his expression was vicious, his voice was also.

"Never saw it before or you either. Peters, put him out."

"Ah, *flûte alors et bien merci!*"

The man wheeled, he went, the door closed and I

passed on through the black and yellow room and then through the portières that hung between it and the pseudo-baronial hall.

Bradish was at my heels and as I seated myself I put it to him.

"Who is your friend?"

Vicious still, he barked. "How do I know? He had a cheque drawn to somebody or other with what purported to be my signature."

"A forgery?"

He flung out his napkin. "What else? They will spot it quick enough at the bank."

"What was the tune?"

"Four thousand and odd."

"But look here. Are you sure it is not some cheque of yours that has been raised?"

"Even so, it would not matter."

He was wrong in that and I told him so.

He washed a clam down with chablis and exploded a "Ha!" to which he added: "Ever notice the little joker on a Bank of England note?"

"What little joker?"

"On the left side of the second letter of the word that tells the amount, there is a microscopic white speck. Unless you knew of it, never in the world would you see it was there."

"What of it?"

"Before the second letter of my name on my cheques I put a little pen prick. The tellers look for it first."

"Such originality is stupendous."

He put it from him. "It was my father's idea."

And what an old smarty he must have been, I thought. But I said, "Well, if you slip up on this

cheque it won't hurt you.' I would be ashamed myself to be as rich as you are."

He shoved at his plate. "You do talk such rot."

It was sheer envy on his part. He wanted to talk it himself. He wanted to trot Nelly Chilton out again. If you are gone on a girl you must talk of her even if you have to talk to yourself. He could not. The presence of Peters and Gedney prevented. Conscious of which angrily he ate and savagely he drank.

What were the courses that followed, I have forgotten but finally coffee came and to my regret the servants withdrew.

Then at once he was back to his muttons, endlessly, *da capo* and all over again until, after a full hour of them, Peters, to my joy, looked in.

"Mrs. Chilton, sir."

Enter the villain, I thought.

Bradish got up and half-turned. "Wait here."

The portières received him. They had parted and through the parting his voice floated back.

"This is so nice of you. Have you had luncheon?"

"Luncheon!" She seemed to spit it. "I am drowning."

"Do sit down."

"I tell you I am drowning and you ask me to sit."

"But——"

I could almost see him floundering with her.

"I want your help," she was saying. "You have got to help me."

That "got" was in italics.

"Certainly. Of course." I could hear him reply. "What is it?"

Slow music, I thought.

"How can I tell you?" But she must have known, for immediately she added, "I am in the hands of——"

Her voice had lowered. I could not hear her. I heard him though.

"A blackmailer!"

At her age! I thought.

Again her voice had sunk to inaudible levels. Yet presently a word swam up, a word of good omen. It was Bonheur, which means happiness, I believe, though hardly when it rhymes with Chanteur, for that means blackmailer, in French at any rate. Then, before I could put them together, a question rang frank as a sword thrust.

"Why don't you marry her?"

From before it, he must have backed.

"Why don't I? Good heavens, she——"

"Take her by storm! Go at her hammer and tongs! Carry her off her feet! God, if I were a man——"

He must have got his wind. "It isn't that. I would pick her up and run to the moon with her. There is nothing I wouldn't do, nothing! But——"

"I know," I heard her cry. "I know. 'God help me,' she told me, me her mother, 'it is either Fred or a convent.' A convent! With her looks! I shall go mad."

She seemed to tear the words, they came from her in tatters and I could fancy her lifting her hands, wringing them, crossing and recrossing the room, and I feared Bradish would say, "Calm yourself."

But at once she was at him from another angle.

"This painted beast, what am I to do with him? Only don't tell me I am a beast myself. I am a beast. I know it. But what is the amount to you? Besides,

I thought you would never notice, or at least that I could make it good before you did. Now——”

“You might better have asked me,” Bradish boomed in. “You could have had it and welcome. As it is I’ll take it up. I can’t do less.”

“But there you are. He says only Nelly herself——”

Again her voice sank and again his swam up.

“I’ll beat him to jelly first.”

She made some sound, a sort of rasping laugh. “Much good it would do for us both to be in Sing Sing—so near the manor, too.”

At that fine levity some plan must have occurred to him. In any event he suggested one.

“Go there. Go there now, today, as fast as you can. She does not know, does she?”

“Not yet.”

“Don’t tell her then. I’ll settle him somehow.”

“But of course I shall tell her. She can’t refuse you then.”

“No, no. It wouldn’t be fair.”

“Leave it to me,” I heard her say and abruptly, for the first time, I realised that I should not have heard her at all. I felt as one may who has been listening at a keyhole. The feeling gave me a twist in the head.

I got up and went to one of the windows from which, in the garden below, I saw a fat man, all in white, a white linen baretta on his head, tormenting a dove-coloured peacock. Momentarily the picture distracted me. But snatches from the duo kept returning. They were like lines in a melodrama. In particular, one stood out: “It is either Fred or a convent.”

Fred, I assumed, was Austen.

The fat man, who wore a third empire imperial pulled at it and looked up. I moved away and, as I turned, Bradish came in.

"Has she gone?" I asked.

"The Lord be praised."

"Look here, Jim. Beat me if you like. I overheard a lot of it."

He sat down, helped himself to a glass of brandy and looked over at me.

"That chap with the cheque was Bonheur et Cie. Ever hear of him?"

"Yes, and of Chanteur et Cie, and so have you. You might have known better than to be so quick with him. I must say you botched it famously."

"That's right. Put me in the wrong."

"You put yourself there."

"But how was I to know? He shoved the damned cheque at me and asked if it were mine. What else was there for me to do except send him to the devil?"

"Well, now you can go after him."

"I can, can I? Then you didn't hear his terms."

"He didn't mention any."

"Not here. But from here he went straight to Mrs. Chilton. What do they give you?"

"For blackmail?"

"Forgery."

"Three or four years I fancy. It depends on how polite you are to the judge. But that is all nonsense. You have only to say the cheque is yours and that is the end of it."

"I would have to say it in court. Besides there would be experts."

"Your testimony would prevail."

"But think of the papers! Think of the mess! He says I disowned it in the presence of witnesses and that either Mrs. Chilton can go to jail or else her daughter can come and see him. Those are his terms."

It was like a page from Balzac. It revolted me and I rounded on him.

"What did you mean then by saying you would settle him?"

"I meant I would lay him out, I suppose."

But that seemed very imbecile and to show no doubt that I could be an imbecile too—which I was—I said what afterward I could have bitten my tongue off for.

"Suppose you let me take a hand."

"If you only could, but how can you?"

"I heard you tell Mrs. Chilton to take her daughter and go to the manor. Did she say she would?"

"Yes, today, this afternoon."

"Follow them then and stand guard."

The strategy was amateur and, what is worse, catastrophic. But he jumped at it. I could see him picturing himself with outstretched hands, hands that dripped with money, protecting two women, one who was certainly no better than she ought to be, and the other too good perhaps for mortal man.

"Meanwhile," I added, "I will hold the blackmailer up."

"How?"

"I can't say. I don't know. But I will. At all events I'll try."

It was then I put my foot in it. At the time the door was open, wide open. It was I that gave it the first shove. That I meant well has nothing to do with

it, or rather it has. Well-meaning people do the most harm.

"There is an inn there," he was saying. "I'll put up at it. Perhaps——" He broke off. He looked away. At what? I do not know. But almost at once he took it up again. "Well, you never can tell. When I am out there with them, she may reconsider it." Again he looked away, then at me. "If I wire you, you will join me, won't you?"

I stood up. "If you wire, I'll never get it. Telephone here. I'll be in tomorrow. It may be that by that time this creature will have changed his tune. If not——"

He nodded at me. "In that case, I'll ask her again."

I did not follow him and I told him so.

"If Nelly marries me, the cheque, whether good or bad, won't make a wrinkle."

"I suppose not," I said. But I was thinking of something else, and I added: "Whom will you take with you?"

"Mike."

"Hold on. Send a line to the bank. Say you guarantee the signature. And I may need Peters. Tell him so. While you are at it, tell him to pack your things. Then hurry out there as fast as you can."

He saw me to the door. As I went down the steps a motor passed. In it was a man with a dyed mustache. I did not know him from Adam, but the mustache reminded me of another, whose owner, a friend of mine, I had been of some slight service to the year before. Among New Yorkers, gratitude is phenomenal. My friend was a Dublin man and at the time—

the poor devil has since passed over—he chiefed it at Police Headquarters.

A taxi took me there. On the way, I evolved a series of schemes that had in view the rout and ruin of Bonheur et Cie. I have forgotten them all now and I regret it. They would have fitted any novel, however poor.

At Headquarters, then in Mulberry Street, I found my friend in the front room, which resembled a real estate office, and where, although he presented the forbidding appearance of an auctioneer, he greeted me with an affability that was painful.

“Me boy, you will just put your fist to this.”

He had leaned over, fished from somewhere a copy of my last turpitude and produced a fountain pen. It made me feel like Ainsworth, who contrived to be the author of a hundred novels and a thousand crimes.

As it happened, he knew nothing of Bonheur and he sent for a vulture-eyed man with a battered beak who knew less.

Meanwhile, without mentioning names, I had given him the facts.

“And a Frenchman is he, me boy? Sure as you live if he is that kind of a bullfrog, he’s wanted over there and that’s why he’s here. I’ll send one of the lads to give him the look-over. Drop in tomorrow. I may have him in chains.”

I took it of course at its face value. None the less it gave me an idea.

VI

THE next forenoon I rang at Bradish's door. Gedney opened, but, as usual, Peters was in the hall.

"Has Mr. Bradish telephoned?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir. Just now. I said you were not here, sir. Mr. Bradish said he would call up again in an hour."

"Where is your hat?"

"My 'at, sir?"

"Call a cab, please, Peters, and come with me. I won't keep you long and I may not need you at all. I am going to a shop on the avenue. When we get there, you stand by the door."

"Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir. May I ask what it is about?"

"A crook who is trying to get the better of Mr. Bradish."

Peters was as straight and probably as strong as a grenadier. But, a professional man, he wore the professional mask. It was wooden. None the less a corner of his lip had lifted very much as a dog's does when about to bite.

"Thank you, sir. I'll have the cab in a moment."

The Maison Bonheur was on the ground floor. It has gone since but, at the time, a small groom stood at the door; a tall commissionaire on the curb. The window, very spacious, delicately hung, exposed nothing so commercial as anything for sale.

As I entered, a young person in black arched her eyebrows at me. The room, behind which extended a suite of other rooms, was fitted with mirrors, with brocaded chairs, with a table that shone. At the moment, a woman, whom I judged a topnotcher, was

talking to another woman, whom I took for a première. But the young person had approached.

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell Bonheur to come here."

"Who shall I say?"

"Say it's a man who wants a word with him and who won't dilly-dally about it either."

The topnotcher looked from the première at me and from me at the première. The latter stared. But the young person had gone and I sat down.

Then almost at once, followed by the young person, the dressmaker appeared.

"I am Mr. Bonheur. What is your business?"

More for copy purposes than anything else, I looked him up and down.

Bradish was not Adonis, but you never would have mistaken him for any but the right sort. The dressmaker had blue-black hair that was curled; dark, crafty eyes; lashes so long that they were probably false; a straight nose, lips full and painted, a powdered chin, a loose tie, an embroidered waistcoat, a coat that fitted like a mannequin's, tight trousers, purple socks, patent leather pumps, the air of a coiffeur and an odour of musk. A chambermaid might have thought him attractive. I thought of what my friend at Headquarters had said and in French straight at him, I threw it.

"I have seen you before."

"You have the advantage of me."

"Every advantage. The last time I saw you was in the Cour d'Assises."

I flung the words at him like so many stones. I could see them land. I could see him wilt. I could see him going mentally down under them. With what he had

been charged in that Paris court, he knew. I did not know. But he thought I knew and the stones were effective. Through mere chance, at the very start, I had him. The rest was easy. But I threw a few more.

"Your name is not Bonheur. It is Chanteur. Yesterday I cabled your description to Paris."

It was not very pretty of me to lie like that. But a chap who won't lie for a woman may be a Christian, he is also a duffer.

He had extended his hands. "*Mais! Mais! Comprends pas.*"

"Yes, you do. You have a cheque that Mr. Bradish signed. You are trying to blackmail a client with it."

He smiled. It is rare to see such a smile. Entirely muscular, it revealed the teeth and left the crafty eyes unaltered.

"*Je vois bien maintenant.* It is a misunderstanding. I have no cheque signed by Mr. Bradish."

"You have a cheque that you brought to his house. That cheque I saw him sign."

"Another cheque, yes. But not this cheque. In the presence of a domestic he disowned it."

I turned. In the doorway, beside the little groom, Peters stood. I motioned at him. In he came.

"Ever seen this man before?"

"Yes, sir. Yesterday."

"Where was that?"

"In the hall at Mr. Bradish's, sir."

"Did you see a cheque, or hear anything about one?"

"No, sir, I did not."

The dressmaker shrieked it. "*Il ment. C'est puant.*"

Peters edged nearer. "Beg pardon, sir. May I ask what he said?"

I smiled at him. "He complimented you on the ease with which he says you lie."

Peters had removed his hat. He put it on. In putting it on he removed his mask. The professional man had gone. Peters had emerged into private life.

"For tuppence, I'd knock your head off. Call me a liar and I'll knock it for nothing."

I motioned at him. "That will do, Peters."

At once the professional man returned. The mask was resumed.

"Thank you, sir."

I looked at the dressmaker. "Mr. Bradish has gone from town. Two ladies, who were misguided enough to come here, have gone also. But I remain and I'll tell you one thing. I'll tell you two of them. You can present that cheque or you can preserve it. But if I hear of so much as a peep from you about it, I will first lay you out and then hand you over to the police."

I stood up and passed on. As I went I saw him in a mirror. He was wiping his face. Alarmed, the topnotcher must have fled. But I could see the première and the young person considering him with slanting eyes.

VII

AT the Buck Club, just around the corner, I had a truffled omelette, a cutlet in curlpapers, admirable service, the day ahead of me, but as yet no word.

On vacating the Maison Malheur which, I fear I vacated rather magnificently, but at the time I was

rather young, I told Peters to go back to the house and, when the telephone asked for me, to have me called at this club, where I then instructed the operator to take down any message and send it to the dining-room on the floor above.

Vain oblations, though how disastrously vain, I did not realise until later. Meanwhile, the dishes gone, I sat and smoked, exchanged the time of day with a man I did not know from Adam and was wondering vaguely why I bothered to talk to him at all, when the message came, a few words from Peters to the effect that Mr. Bradish had not telephoned, that he had hurried in, got the upshot of things and had hurried away, leaving word that I was to be at the Chilton place on the morrow by noon.

The upshot of things? I uncomfortably meditated, as I went down and kicked my heels in the main room, what the dickens did Peters imagine was the upshot? The stones I had thrown, had been thrown in French and although he had seen some of them flying, he might have misjudged their effect.

For one mad moment, I thought of telephoning to him, the next instant sanity returned. I knew I could not. Even the sight of a telephone horripilates me and in my trade one has to avoid anything of the sort. Horripilation arrests the imagination and disrupts your work.

Afterward, in sackcloth and ashes, I regretted it, regretted rather that if the telephone was one too many for me, I had not sent for Peters, dug it out of him, and then flown up the Hudson as I would have flown if I had known. But I did not know. How could I? It is true, I had an intuition that a screw was loose.

Bradish's message was queer. Why should he want me to be at the manor at noon?

In an effort to solve the riddle, I thought of this, that and the other, of everything in fact except that he had botched the whole thing.

In view of what occurred, I have to say and although I hate emphasis, I cannot say it emphatically enough, that what he did, he did innocently, ignorantly, honestly, without knowledge of the facts, thinking it all for the best, best for himself I admit, but best also for her, poor girl, as, in the inscrutable wisdom of the powers that rule our lives, perhaps it was.

Meanwhile, I looked up a time-table, made a mental note of a train and sat back among matters personal.

The Pilar-Morin troupe had been giving pantomime and while I hoped they might rise to mine, I was uncertain whether to dangle it before them personally or have the dangling done by an agent. Yet as either course had its disadvantages, I postponed any immediate decision, yawned my head off, lounged out, lounged in, dined with two polo men and afterward read all the evening papers, in one of which I discovered that the Pilar-Morins had gone. When have I loved a dear gazelle that it did not sicken, yes, and die? It was too much and I went home.

The next morning I was up at what I think I have seen described as betimes. In spite of which, or perhaps precisely on that account, I missed the train. It may seem fantastic to say it now and yet I cannot but believe that, if I had not missed it, what afterward occurred would not have occurred at all.

When, ultimately, a village trap dropped me at the manor, Bradish ran out and cursed me. I expected

nothing else. Through the mysterious laws of life any kindness is repaid in pain.

It was then a trifle after one and the day was of the Veronese school, a day made of light, of colour, of cobalt, apple-green and ochre. In the air was the smell of lilacs. Beyond was the Hudson and, before me, the house, ugly, comfortable, the mortgaged windows candid and open.

In the days of the landed gentry, in the days of big bugs, bigwigs, chariots, postillions, red coats, loud oaths and tenant-tilled estates, the manor had, I dare say, been as good as the rest of them, superior perhaps, but on that Veronese high noon, it seemed down at the heel, as such places do seem when the odour of gentry has gone and that of the bailiffs has come. It was like some of the places in England where the draw-bridge has crumbled and the moat is choked. Moreover, originally mile after mile in extent, running far up from the river and reaching nobly to the north and south, time and creditors had dwindled and curtailed it. Of the great estate that had been, only the house and the immediate grounds survived, only these and two buildings, one of wood, the other of stone; one the family stable, the other the family vault.

But Bradish, ceasing to revile me, was talking, hurriedly enough, about matters that I did not quite grasp, but mainly that they were just sitting down to it, that owing to the haste of it all, there was only Mrs. Chilton, Mrs. Trefusis, Austen, the clergyman and the bride.

I looked at him. "The bride?"

"My dear chap, I am, or will be—it is a bit awkward for the moment—but I shall be the happiest man in

the world and I owe a lot of it to you. Now come on in. You are too late to act for me at the wedding, as I hoped you would; you are in time, though, to drink our health."

"But——" I found but that.

He misunderstood it. "Bonheur be blowed. It is of no consequence now what he says or does. She is mine!"

His eyes lifted. His face had cleared. The spider was dead. He seemed transfigured. Never had I seen him like that before. Never did I see him like that again. It was his one moment of happiness. Already the door was closing on him. He was at the threshold of the Eblian halls.

At the time I knew nothing of that door, nothing of those halls. I knew only that Peters had botched it, that Bradish was unaware that Bonheur had been squelched, and a sudden picture surged—Mrs. Chilton telling her daughter the pretty tale of a blackmailer, leaving it to her darling to decide whether she would suffer her mother to be jailed, pointing to Bradish as their saviour, constraining her to accept him and I felt for the poor devil a pity that was infinite. For when that girl knew, as she would know, as everything is known, nothing could convince her that he had not been a party to it. Never for a second would she believe that she had not first been rooked and then bought and sold.

Rather idle to tell him that then. Rather idle to mar with now superfluous information, a day not merely perfect but which to him was ideal. I could do nothing except what I did do. I followed him in.

I had seen Nelly Chilton—Mrs. James Bradish as

she then was—but twice. On each occasion her beauty had been incredible. Where was it then? She was standing behind a table. Beside her was Austen. Nearby, Mrs. Chilton was directing a waiter. In a window, a clergyman was talking to Mrs. Trefusis. Through another window, I could see Mike. From the walls, Chiltons with vermillion coats and lace jabots, others with powdered hair and pointed bodices, looked on. In the air was a scent of lilacs.

The table was spread. There were dishes, wines, flowers, all of which, the waiter included, must have come from Fifth Avenue, ordered by Bradish, charged to his account.

These details, unimportant in themselves, contributed to the atmosphere of this room that was stirred by that girl's vibrations. The clergyman held his head a trifle to one side, as though appreciating something said by Mrs. Trefusis, who was quite incapable of saying anything appreciable, and who was looking, not at him, but at the others, at Mrs. Chilton, painted and flushed; at Austen, black from the black tumult within him, and at that girl.

Hatted, dressed in a costume of light cloth that was dark, what had been done to her? Paphos had crumbled, Venus had gone. Instead was Hades and Proserpine drawn into it. Exquisite still, as Proserpine must have been, she had lost her flagrant beauty. White as a sheet, her lips quivered. There were no tears in her eyes. In their purple pools there was worse, a look that those have who are haunted.

Austen was speaking to her. She did not reply. She was gazing straight ahead, at what? I cannot say. At things visible only to herself perhaps, but, more

probably, I think she was meditating ways and means of escape, which even as they fluttered before her, she must have known were absurd. Her spirit may have been brave. The pale camisole of what is correct, the straitjacket of conventionality, strapped her. None the less, I think that given one of the sudden tempests that the Hudson knows and from which, in a second, night is flung, given that and I believe she would have taken Austen and bolted. It was more the vivid day than the pale camisole that restrained her.

These impressions, however long in the telling, were close packed in a moment's space. They flooded me as I entered. A moment more and the atmosphere cleared. Mrs. Chilton smiled, Austen turned, the bride lowered her eyes, the clergyman abandoned the window, Mrs. Trefusis approached, the waiter advanced and, to the latter's patent astonishment, over the table, with head bowed, the clergyman said grace.

A cork popped. I found myself eating *foie gras*, an abominable dish, which reminded me of duties already sufficiently shirked and rising, glass in hand, I proposed the health of the happy couple.

The clergyman took it up. I like clergymen, when they are likeable, and Dr. Renwick, God bless him, was a likeable man, in fine form, and between us we managed to keep it going, managed to evoke at least the ghost of gaiety that every wedding feast demands.

But the whole thing was ghastly. That girl neither ate, nor drank, nor spoke. Ramrodded in her chair she looked at Austen, who looked at her, as she looked at him, with eyes that were tragic. But while her face, to which the rare and *riante* beauty seemed then to

have said farewell, was white and tense, his face was black and violent.

It was poignant. An old air, quaint and sugared, an aria from the *Somnambula*, the *O perché non posso odiarte*, beat time in my head. It was precisely as though they were joining in, wondering why, in so much love, hate could not enter.

With that surety that breeding is, Bradish appeared unconscious of it. The spider had leaped into life again, but any venom it may have been distilling he splendidly concealed, rattling on at Mrs. Chilton, turning from her to the clergyman, from him to Mrs. Trefusis, and back again to his sudden mother-in-law.

That woman, with her painted face and air of intolerable secrets, had a look frightened and relieved. The fright was retrospective. It had gone. But fright, even in going, leaves its mark. The mark was on her, yet mitigated by an immense relief. Everybody was dished. Cræsus was her son-in-law. None the less, beneath her summoned smiles, perhaps she shuddered. Yet with the same surety that Bradish displayed, she talked and laughed, turning now to Mrs. Trefusis, again to her daughter, turning away, forced to seem as unconscious of her as Bradish appeared.

Foie gras is fit only for the cultivated taste of a drayman. *Suprême de poulet Régence* is a mockery to a hungry man. At high noon champagne turns one's stomach. I would have given a dollar, two dollars, five, for a cut of beef, a baked potato, a mug of ale. In that extravagant mood, ardently I wished myself elsewhere. The breakfast apart, it was distressing to look at the bride. It seemed to me painful to stare at Proserpine descending into Hades, though, could I

have foreseen the deeper depths in which she was to pass, instead of staring, I would have screamed.

Then, to my relief, Bradish said something to Mrs. Chilton. She stood up. We all stood up, except the waiter, who was already standing. In spite of the odour of food and wine, faintly the scent of lilacs lingered. Through a window, from which I had previously seen Mike, I saw him again, grooming a car in which were bags and a hatbox. From the window I looked at the bride. She was talking then, talking inaudibly to Austen, saying perhaps the tender things that hurt and hurt, the words that bring tears swiftest. From them, I looked at Bradish.

"Jim," I called, and as I spoke I went over and took his hand, "I don't know where you are bound, but wherever it may be, my best wishes, all of them, every one, go with you."

He did not reply. He just nodded and shook my hand. He was, I realised, strung up to the breaking point of human emotion. But he did not betray it. It was the spider that did. Glowing with a crimson and baleful life of its own, I could almost see the antennæ contract.

"God bless you," I told him. "The things I leave unsaid to your wife, say to her for me."

Still he said nothing. He nodded as before and shook my hand with a grasp that was mighty.

Why did I not hold on to him as mightily? Why did I leave him for what he was going on to meet? It was there. It was just beyond. It was at the turn of the road. Eyes clearer than mine could have seen it. Hands firmer than mine would have held him. A voice

more gifted would have told him not to leave that room.

In looking back at it now, when it is all over and done for, it seems to me, as it must seem to many another, that when we are a bit more evolved, we will look ahead as readily as we now look back; that the immediate future will be as clear as the immediate past. Or, more correctly perhaps, we will realise that there is no future, no past, merely a continuous present in which events occur. Those events we will see, as the traveller on a highway sees meadows or bogs, abysses or peaks, friends or foes, or, perhaps, merely courtyards curtained with cashmeres where chimeras and hippogriffs crouch. Consciously he goes on to meet them or, as consciously, turns away.

All that, and stupid enough it is, and, by the same token, sufficiently unconsolatory, came to me later. Meanwhile, I must have taken some sort of *congé*. I say I must have because, while I would have taken French leave, as they call it in England, and English leave, as they call it in France, some forms I did observe. But I remember nothing about it. All I do recall is a diligent smile that I got from Mrs. Chilton and a look, absolutely haunted, that came to me from that girl. That look, from that girl, who was barely a bride, accompanied me to the village where I went with the clergyman and with the waiter tagging behind.

I did not then know the clergyman's name. A few moments later I learned that it was Renwick, a good name as he, I am sure, was a good man.

On the way down, a car shot by. In it was Mrs. Trefusis. A car followed, a car long, narrow, grey,

one which I had already seen at the manor. In it I had a glimpse of Austen, flying on, ignoring us, lost to everything, lost in the black tumult of his soul.

Meanwhile the clergyman had been quoting Thomas à Kempis. Interested in what he was saying, I forgot the haunted eyes. By this time we had reached the village and, as he was reciting a passage, it came, a bolt, as the phrase is, from the blue.

Mentally, it took me a moment to adjust myself. Meanwhile, I was staring at the man who had precipitated it. Seated in a waggon he was yelling at the clergyman, calling him by name, which I then learned was Renwick. It was not hot on that Veronese day, yet he was perspiring, yelling and wiping his face at the same time, urging Dr. Renwick to get in and: "You, too, young feller, if you know 'em."

He spat and shouted. "It was up yonder. They're all dead, all three of 'em. I'm headed for Dr. Curtis. But there's room for all. Get in."

In his cultivated voice, I heard Dr. Renwick say: "Mr. Belcher, I am sorry. I have not understood what you were telling me. Who is dead?"

Again the Comanche shouted: "Miss Chilton and two men."

We all know we are to die and few of us believe it, and naturally perhaps, since there is no such thing as death. But death, even in its literal meaning, lacked coherence then. I could not believe it. My mind had not yet adjusted itself to what my ears had heard. But I was aware that Dr. Renwick was hurriedly questioning and I was aware, too, of hurried and shouted replies. I was aware also of a gathering group, sprung from nowhere, from a saloon opposite, from the side-

walk, from a grocery nearby, from the station beyond, from the sky; a group that had dropped or arisen about us and it was dully, from sounds that seemed to proceed from afar that I absorbed and reassembled the purport of it all and of which the substance was that Bradish's car, flung out like a meteor, had thrown a wheel, reared, reversed, turned over and that those within were dead.

Then at once, from the momentary and mental swoon, I swam up and I thought, what does this Yahoo know about it? They may not be dead; knocked out perhaps, perhaps unconscious, but not dead.

Even then I denied myself the truth. That was sheer primitiveness, the instinct of self-preservation, for truth, some truths at least, can drive one mad.

VIII

WHEN I reached the manor, they were there. Anything being preferable to the yelling Yahoo, it had been a relief to see him take Dr. Renwick and go. Of the relief that they were in search, I had my doubts and also my certainties. A country practitioner, what could he do? At once Cally and his wizardries hopped in my mind.

Already the door, the enigmatic door, was closing. I did not know that. I knew of no door. Yet, as I later discovered, in that door I turned the key.

Meanwhile, entering the station, I wrote a telegram to Cally which I incorrectly addressed. Since then I have often wondered what might have occurred if I had addressed it correctly. But as often I have concluded that Cally was prevented from receiving the

telegram not, primarily, because of an error of mine, but because it was not intended that it should reach him. The progressions of life and of death it is not for mortals to alter. When they do alter them, or appear to, what is done was in accordance with higher designs. That is the occult view to which sometimes, though not always, I adhere.

The wire itself, it took me quite a little while to send, the operator happening to be refreshing himself elsewhere. It was therefore some time after the Comanche had gone that I reached the manor, and, as I have said, when I did reach it, they were there.

The door of the house was open. Open and empty too was the hall. In the room where we had breakfasted there were but the brave and bodiced Chiltons looking on from their frames on the walls, only these, half emptied bottles, dishes unremoved, the remains of a wedding feast at which Death, too, had looked on.

As I entered the hall, I heard voices that came from the floor above. There, in a room hung with faded chintz, furnished with rickety Sheratons, on a satin-wood fourposter, lay that girl. Over her a little man bent. He was shaking his head. It seemed very empty. But the motion distracted me. I looked at the others, at Mrs. Chilton, at a woman I had never seen, and at Dr. Renwick who, holding a book from which he must have read the marriage service, was concluding some prayer.

"Heart failure superinduced by shock," the little man by way of Amen pronounced and I looked again at that girl.

Her eyes, that had seemed so haunted, then were closed and her face, that had been so drawn and tense,

had recovered its former beauty. It was as though death in taking her life had given back her loveliness. The jewels, which imaginatively I had strung about her and which she had never needed, had gone, as the haunted look had gone. In their stead was peace, the peace that is perhaps beyond all knowledge, yet attenuated, I thought, by just the quiver of a passing smile, a smile that just showed itself and went. The effect, highly curious, was as though her *riante* charm had made an effort to return and death had pulled it back.

"Yes," Death seemed to say, "in my arms you may be lovely, but smiles I cannot brook."

That, too, was imagination. I saw it was. In the upturned commas of her perfect mouth there was no suggestion of any smile at all. Death had kissed her smiles away; kissed from her despair, happiness, sorrow, kissed her into peace.

"So far as I can determine," the little man was saying, "not a single lesion. Just the heart."

"And Bradish?" I asked and checked myself, for the girl's mother was sobbing.

It was her fault. At that moment she knew it. At that moment she knew what the Halls of Eblis are, the horrible halls of the horrible hell into which the foster sisters, Regret and Remorse, can fling you.

A hand covered her eyes, from which tears, possibly scorching, certainly unredeeming, ran down into the paint beneath. What could I do? What could anyone do? A poet said he could sympathise with anything except suffering. I had no sympathy for hers, but apparently Dr. Renwick felt differently.

"My dear Mrs. Chilton! My dear Mrs. Chilton!"

he was remonstrating. "Sorrow is sent to make us nobler than we were."

You are entirely right, I thought. But you miss the point. Sorrow afflicts the spirit that is freed, particularly when the spirit is probably present, probably in this very room. A line of de Vere's recurred to me: "Grief should be like joy, equable, sedate."

But more effective perhaps than the clergyman's ministrations, was the ingrained sentiment of form. Mrs. Chilton choked back her sobs and when her hand fell, as it immediately did fall, she displayed a visage blotched certainly (for water and paint do not marry very well), but assured. To have achieved that so promptly did not show callousness. One is never callous about oneself. But it constituted one of the minor triumphs of civilised life.

She turned to me. "Dr. Curtis says Mr. Bradish will recover. Will you come where he is?"

On the way, the little man buttonholed me.

"I did not say that. I said he might recover. A man of means, I understand. I'll telephone for a nurse."

"For a dozen," I told him.

In a room, practically a duplicate of the other except for the furniture which was Chippendale, Bradish lay on another colonial fourposter. Unconscious as he was, he did not know, and might never know, what had happened. Already his clothes had been removed; already, too, he had been examined. "A broken collar-bone," the little man announced, and that I knew was nothing. "A broken ankle," he continued, and that I knew was less. But, to these, he added an occipital fracture and I thanked God I had wired for Cally.

The next visit was to poor Mike who, like that girl, was dead; though, unlike her, his neck was broken.

Mrs. Chilton, meanwhile, had disappeared and I went down to the hall, where I found Dr. Renwick. He was just leaving. The funeral, he said, was to be at noon, in forty-eight hours, and, since I was returning to town, would I insert the usual notices and add, it was Mrs. Chilton's wish, he explained, that the funeral was private.

"Yes," I told him, "but there is a lot else: Bradish cannot be moved. He will have to have nurses. The nurses will have to be fed. I know nothing of the domestic arrangements here but, apparently, they are not profuse. If Mrs. Chilton does not object, and I hope she will not, I shall send some of his servants."

Vaguely he motioned. "Pray do so, Mrs. Chilton was to have gone from here today. Now she will go immediately after the funeral of that poor child, whom I loved like a daughter."

"Where is her father?" I asked.

He raised his eyes, shook his head. I saw that he did not know, saw too that the question distressed him.

I put on my hat. "May I accompany you?"

Courteously he consented and, as we went down the road, which twice that day I had ascended and on which on each occasion, the Daughters of Hazard, of whom Æschylus tells, had lain in wait, he stopped and gave me his hand. He was going, he said, to the undertaker.

"An undertaker here! In this little place!" I exclaimed.

"Death visits the hamlet as well as the metropolis," he replied.

A cross-road took him and I went on to the station alone, more alone, I think, than I had ever been before. I could not comfortably contemplate a future from which Bradish was eliminated and, if he recovered, if he did, I felt that it would be harder still for him to reconcile himself to the long rain of days from which she had gone. To have got her partook of the marvellous, but to have got her one moment and to have lost her the next, might become to him a retrospective torture that would inhabit his thoughts until the accustoming hands of time calmed him and lulled him and let him forget.

So I thought. I thought it would pass as all things pass. Yes, I thought that. I could not foresee that there was to be no forgetfulness, nothing but the fidelity of torture that was to take him and play on him and strike from him every note in the whole gamut of pain.

IX

ANOTHER day after Veronese.

As the train flung itself along the river, I told myself I had done all I could. To the surprise of a clerk in a cage, I had shoved at him a marriage notice and a death notice of even date, both concerning the same person. He did not like it and who would? I had to establish my identity before he would accept them. Meanwhile I had shipped to the manor whatever an unconscious man needs the least. I had gone to the great white staring house and sent Peters with the chef and two other servants to the station. I had gone to Mike's widow. I had done other things which I have

since forgotten. I had done all I could. But in the train that was taking me to the funeral, I had a sense of subconscious discomfort, the sense of some paramount thing overlooked. Then, just before the train was stopping, out it hopped.

Cally!

In the hurry of all I had had to do, I had neglected to go to his office. But, I consolingly reflected, what did it matter?

That it did matter, and monumentally, I was not to learn until later and yet why, at the time, it should have pricked me, I doubt if Freud could have told.

What did it matter? I reflected. I had not been to his office and would not have found him if I had, for he must have gone to the manor, where probably he had remained. The idea that my telegram was an estray never entered my head.

In the train were small detachments of silent and sombre people, relatives I fancied, and I was convinced of it when they all got out at the station, where conveyances for them which the undertaker must have seen to and supplied, yet perhaps inadequately; in any event there was none for me, unless I intruded on mourners whom I did not know, and while capable of a good deal, but not of that, I started off on foot, disconsolately noting that the day of the wedding and the day of the funeral were twins. There were the same colours, the same myrrh and cassia in the air that was not of spring or of summer but of both, a season not for death but for life, a time to love love, not to bury it.

"Will you get in?" someone was saying.

I had heard a car, but I had not looked. Then I

did look. It was the long, grey car I had seen after the wedding and in which had been Austen hurrying on in that effort which is the most desperate of all, the attempt to escape from oneself. He was in the car then and, as I looked, I thought his face blacker even than before, a face that expressed not the sorrow that he must have felt, but rebellion at life, at death, at all there is, at all there shall be; the face of a soul in hell.

"Will you get in?" he repeated and, when I did, he asked about Bradish.

I told him what I could. He asked nothing else. He said nothing more. I fancied that he knew as much as I did.

In the papers of the day before there had been accounts headlined, featured, graphic, inexact. The tragic wedding of the last of the Chiltons to the playmate of her childhood. The beauty of the bride. The wealth of the bridegroom. The death of the one. The mortal injuries of the other. The manor. Colonial New York. The mourning of what was termed the four hundred.

These accounts Austen had certainly seen and I wondered whether he had already run up to the village. I did not ask, nor did I ever learn that he had, though afterward, from circumstances that developed, I realised that he must have. At the time however, during the brief drive, he said nothing more, nor did I hear him utter another syllable. Yet then, one does not go to a funeral to talk and necessarily this was more than a funeral to him, much more, though how I arrived at that extravagant conjecture is beyond me even now.

The brief procession from the train had entered the house when we reached it and together we passed on

and in to the room of the candid and mortgaged windows, through which a breath of lilacs came.

Into that breath there filtered the subtler fragrance of lilies that banked an open coffin in which the dead girl lay. Behind the coffin, his back to the wall, from which the brave and bodiced Chiltons looked, was Dr. Renwick. Before the coffin were the mourners, among whom I had a glimpse of a man who, though he stood with bowed head, had an air of extreme distinction. I had a glimpse also of a stricken woman.

Rouge is not mourning. Her face was unpainted. But that air of ease, of potential arrogance, of intolerable secrets, the impression wholly atmospheric which previously Mrs. Chilton had suggested, the impression of a soul at bay, that had gone. She looked what she was, a woman conscious that the blow that had struck her her own hand had dealt.

Unobtrusively I hope, in any event as quietly as I could, I edged nearer to where the dead girl lay. Forty-eight hours earlier I had seen that Death in kissing her had brought her beauty back, heightening it even, rendering it calm, unaware of emotion as true beauty ever is, divesting it of anguish, divesting it, too, of joy. In Death's arms she had been at peace.

But at this time, as, in edging nearer the coffin, I saw her again, her expression seemed to have changed. Her lips half-parted showed the nacre of her teeth and in and about them, in and about the downcast eyes, there was a look different from that which Death had brought, different also from that which Death had kissed away. In those days I was less familiar with the phenomena of death than I have since become. I knew then that those whom the gods love die young. I

did not know that the gods in sending death to those they love send with it some vision of the supernal. It was there. In those upturned lips and downcast eyes there was wonder.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life!"

The sonorous and exalting words, the most exalting that I know, shook me. From the dead, I looked at the living. I looked at the clergyman, at the mourners, at the lover.

Death, the death rather and the sight of it, may have wrought its miracles on him. In his car, on the way to the house, he had looked defiant, rebellious, a soul at odds with God and man. But now, in some way, through some special grace, through one of the miracles that Death achieves, peace had, or appeared to have, descended upon him. What his face displayed was not resignation, which may be, and often is, but a form of mental suicide, but relief, the relief that comes when hope, fear, uncertainty, all the vultures of the mind, have fled, when the worst that can be has been done.

At the time, it was in that manner that I viewed it. Afterward, in reassembling impressions, another explanation, less laboured and more obvious occurred to me. The change in Austen, if change there really were, I attributed to the simple process of thanksgiving. He had lost the girl he loved, yet the loss had been strangely mitigated. An unbearable knowledge had been lifted from him. He could not have her, but neither could anyone else. She had been taken, but not to another's arms. What he had lost, no one had won.

It was in recognition of that, I thought, that the

thanksgiving had come, and I thought also that the thanksgiving was very human. That the girl of girls shall not be won, murder after murder has been committed. That too is human. Human and tolerably primitive.

Meanwhile, the service had ended. A stout man, fussy but silent, the undertaker, attended to the coffin's removal to the hall, where I followed and where neatly, swiftly, almost noiselessly, he closed it.

To me, it was like a kick in the stomach. I looked away. On the adjacent stair was Peters. Without speaking, I motioned. The motion, I knew, sufficed. I knew he would know that presently I would return. As I motioned, I thought of Cally. Where was he?

But at once the coffin's journey began again and we all went on and out to the grounds and the vault, a structure roomy and chill, where perhaps the shades of departed Chiltons greeted the spirit of their kinswoman who, forty-eight hours earlier, during that other ceremony had, I am sure, despairfully wished for the peace that was theirs, had wished also and far more desperately that Bradish were Austen.

As the coffin passed into the crypt, back from it came the odour of tuberose, the scent sweet and deadly of wreaths put upon it. I have never forgotten it. Dr. Renwick was then reciting the last words of the final rites and, these ended, I turned back to the house.

In the hall was Peters.

"How is he?" I asked.

"The nurse says——"

"But Dr. Cally? What does he say?"

"Dr. Cally, sir? I haven't seen him. Dr. Curtis——"

"Do you mean to tell me Dr. Cally has not been here?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

It was inconceivable. The idea that I had botched the address never occurred to me. What did occur to me was that when I could I would give him fits.

The opportunity was not delayed. Mephistophe-lianly, in the open doorway, there he stood.

I sprang at him. "What the devil! Where have you been? Why haven't you come before?"

One look, a look bland and sarcastic, was all he deigned to give me and that look he diverted to Peters.

"Upstairs? Lead the way."

"But see here," I threw in and started to follow.

He turned to me. "You stay where you are."

The stair took him, and would have taken me, had not philosophy, an old friend of mine, caught me by the arm, remarking that Cally was quite right, that I would be only in the way, that explanations of mine would explain nothing, that certainly he did not need to be told what certainly I did not know, whereupon instead of damning, I blessed. Thank God, he was there!

The mourners, meanwhile, were leaving. Not all, however. Two women and a man were entering the hall. One of the women was Mrs. Chilton. When I saw her in the room beyond, probably she had a hat on. I had not noticed. I saw it then, saw too that she was heavily veiled. I had moved aside and as, with the other woman, she passed me, she made some slight inclination of the head. Then up the stair they went. I had never seen the other woman before and I have never seen Mrs. Chilton since. Afterward I learned

that that afternoon both had driven away. But had I known that that was to be my last meeting with Mrs. Chilton, mentally I would have wished her well. It is very pontifical to judge anybody.

Then, immediately, I found myself judging the man who had come in with them. He had an arid air, the dry, self-sufficient look of the super-rich and a mouth like a buttonhole. Probably a banker, I thought: probably, too, the husband of the woman who had just gone up the stair. I did not envy either of them and suddenly I felt very hostile.

He was there, fiddling with his hat, affecting to regard me as part of the furniture. It was not that that angered me. What angered was that Mrs. Chilton, instead of messing things with that blackmailer of a dressmaker, could not have gone to him and could not go, because, while manifestly the man was a relative, she knew him to be poor, unwilling to aid. For it is unwillingness to aid that constitutes poverty, and that is the poverty, not of the poor, but of the rich.

Then at once the idea passed, banished by another, the possibility that the painted blackmailer and the painted mother-in-law were in league together and I cursed myself that I had not thought of it before. Any jackass could have seen that ordinarily Bonheur would never have gone to Bradish with the cheque. Ordinarily he would have put it through his bank. And for how much was it after all? Bradish had said four thousand, but he had barely glanced at it. It might have been forty thousand and I could picture Mrs. Chilton waving it at the dressmaker, staking him with it in return for services that would enable her to force her daughter's hand.

Momentarily, the picture occupied me. Before I could elaborate it, there was Peters on the stair.

"Well?"

"Dr. Cally's compliments, sir, and if you are to wait, you will please not wait for him. No, sir, Dr. Cally is to be here for some time."

"But what else did he say? What did he say about Mr. Bradish?"

"Nothing, sir. Nothing to me. But I don't think he is easy in his mind about him, sir."

For that matter, I was not easy in my mind, either. Nor had I been, not for a moment since the Yahoo yelled. Consequently I did want something to go on and I said:

"Look here, Peters. You say I want to see him."

"Yes, sir, I will ascertain. But he has the door closed and he said he wouldn't let anyone in, not even Mr. Bradish's own mother if she came here from the grave."

Well, that at least was definite and I went out on the grounds where for a moment I stood and looked at the vault.

That door, too, was closed.

X

PEACE is never the bedfellow of the anxious, and anxious I was the next day, as I sat in my own workshop. Far more so than three years before when I found myself dished. A man may lose a fortune and recover and double it. He cannot replace a friend. At the time, I had no other friend than Bradish. The events of the last few days needed talking over.

I wanted to talk them over. Few can be conversational alone. But with whom? That also came to me. In the course of the evening I rang at Aly Bolton's door.

"Who is it?" she asked from within.

I told her and she opened.

The narrow hall, a hall identical in construction with my own, was hung with India shawls and the living-room, though also identical with my own, appeared much larger and so appeared because the centre was uncluttered. Moreover, at either end was a mirror. Then also, the *étagère*, the chairs, the table, placed back against the walls, were none of them in the way, while on the walls were prints, dark and old, from which the walls seemed to recede.

I used to think that a man's distinction resided in the distinction of his surroundings and though I think so no longer, none the less it would have been obvious to anyone not courageously vulgar that the occupant of the little flat was an artistic young woman. A gifted young woman, too, as I had already discovered.

"I have felt for you," she said as we sat at that table. "The papers told me. And now you are troubled."

"It is about Bradish," I replied. "He and I are pals. I don't know whether he will pull through. By the way. Occasionally he must have disturbed you. He used to come here and raise the dead."

She exclaimed at it. "I thought it was he! I saw him once at your door, but he did not see me. He was too busy trying to get at you. I liked his face. It is very beautiful."

Wonderingly I looked at her.

"Yes, the face of a beautiful nature."

I nodded. "Yes, he has that. But I am sure you are right in saying he did not see you. If he had he would have stood and mused and afterward told me of it."

"No, he did not see me."

She spoke simply as the complex do speak. On the table between us was a service, of Danish ware I think, and she asked would I have tea.

She got up to prepare it and again I looked about. The mirror at the farther end of the room was framed in lacquered bamboo. Adjacent were shelves of polished wood on which were books. Facing them was the piano. It was all very ordinary. It was the atmosphere that charmed. I have been in ornate apartments where the vibrations jarred; in opulent homes where they were so malign I could not remain. In this two-by-four flat there were none or, if there were any, they were restful. It was an atmosphere in which there was nothing discordant; not the atmosphere of the cloister for that is choked; not the atmosphere of bohemianism for that is pretentious. It was the atmosphere that is created only by those whose ways are pleasant, by the gentle and by gentlefolk.

Returning with the samovar, she poured me a cup. She made no offer of cream, of sugar, nor yet of lemon. It was tea she gave me, just tea, as tea should be drunk, when it is tea, and this was tea, the real thing, tea that needed only a honeysuckle or two to make it celestial, tea of a variety and of a quality that could be obtained but in the Chinese quarter and there at one shop only.

I knew that tea. It awed me. For I knew, too,

what it cost and, vaguely, I wondered where she got the money.

"That night," she was saying. "You remember? You talked of antique sins. Anxiety was one of them. I think you need not sin that way. I may be in error, but I think your friend will recover."

It was easy enough to say, but merely because it was easy she seemed hardly the one to say it. In speaking, she had raised a cup and I had been looking at her. She wore a blouse embroidered in the Rumanian manner. As always, her expression was noble and reserved. Nelly Chilton had been sent out as perhaps only a blackmailing *faiseur* can send out a young woman. Apart from that, apart too from her *riante* look, apart also from her Mayfair intonation, in feature, in colouring, there she sat.

"It is startling," I told her.

That time she missed it. "But I may be wrong."

I shook my head. "It is the resemblance."

The cup which she still held she put down. "From what I read about her it was instantaneous. That is terrible. It would have been so inexpressibly better for her if she could have lingered a little and realised that she must die."

I took it up. "'From battle, murder and sudden death, Good Lord, deliver us.'"

"Yes, and how profound that is. The shock of sudden death confuses. The dead do not know they are dead. They think they are still here. Well, perhaps they are. Perhaps they are the ghosts of whom one hears and never sees."

From her lips it sprang out at me, the central sit-

uation for a novel and commercially I exclaimed, "That's it!"

There again she must have missed it. She looked but she did not speak.

"Shop," I told her. "To a chap in my trade nothing comes amiss. We make copy out of our own disasters.

She laughed, and in laughing her resemblance to Nelly Chilton became not startling merely, but exact.

Without mentioning it, I sat back. "Yes, but the point is elsewhere or rather it is here. I have been threshing about for a plot. A moment ago before you sat the needy knife-grinder. Now he is needy no longer. You have suggested a story. And hello!" I interrupted myself to exclaim, "here comes the title, The bourne from which——?"

Noiselessly she clapped her fingers. "A ghost story! There never has been a good one. The chance is yours. Take it. The title itself should inspire. The bourne from which——"

She paused and added, "I wonder, though, if every reader can fill out the rest of it. Yet, even incorrectly given, 'The bourne from which no traveller returns' is too long."

"Well," I said, "when it appears, if it ever does appear, you must let me bring you a copy."

"Thank you. You will find it easier to mail it."

"You are not leaving here, are you?"

"Next week. I go to Paris."

As she spoke she went to the piano, rippled the keys and hummed rather than sang the *valse chantante*, *O Paris, gai séjour!*

Desisting, she turned. "The house where I am is sending me. You shall have the address."

"I congratulate you. But the story will keep until you return. Besides it would clash with that gaiety. If I can, I want to make the reader shriek with fright, tear his hair out and hide under the bed."

She laughed. "The shiver at last!"

On that high note I would have gone, but from somewhere Signor Matouchi appeared and yawned at me. I tickled him in the stomach. Ostentatiously, he purred.

Then, kissing her hand, I left.

XI

A WEEK later I would have burned an incense-wand, only I did not happen to have one. A message had reached me. If I had dictated it myself it could not have been more to my taste. It was a message which either clairvoyantly or sympathetically Aly Bolton had divined. Bradish would recover. That was all. There are brevities that are enormous. It was at the amplitude of this brevity that I would have burned an incense-wand.

The message was from Cally. It had come from his office. That day I looked in there. I found him at a vast table on which was a riding crop and a box of cigars. Nothing else, except over the table his infernal blandness, two fingers and a moment's talk.

The fingers withdrawn he pointed one at me.

"What have you behind the forehead?"

"Pulp."

"In that pulp the objective changes of the external world are converted into the subjective changes of consciousness. But in what manner the conversion

is effected no one knows and, in our day, no one will."

"What of it?"

"A lesion of the occipital cortex may affect that mystery. Bradish has a lesion of that nature. He will recover, but whether mentally he is the same man again depends on circumstances which I am now too idle to explain."

He stood up. "Come again when I am busy."

A hand on my elbow, he was edging me along, dangling the keys of Destiny at me.

I shook him off. "When can I see him?"

"When I have him in town. You can see him then, that is if he does not object."

Mephistophelianly Cagliostro smiled. It was as though he were adding: "If it were I now, you'd never get in."

I, too, can smile and I said: "I'll pay you for that. By the Lord Harry, I'll put you in a book."

Blandly he shoved me out. "It takes genius to concoct a horrible revenge."

Well, he was right. As I turned the corner I thought of Æschylus, before whose spectres women swooned, and I wished for his stylus, a wish instantly replaced by a hope. I had walked straight into Aly Bolton and I hoped she was dying of hunger.

"Look!" I exclaimed. "Over there! A few streets down! A man is beckoning at you!"

"Very impertinent of him. Who is he?"

"A sorcerer. He is calling, 'Miss Bolton! Miss Bolton! Come to my arms and before you I will set strawberries and *crème vierge*, plovers' eggs beaten into an amber foam, quinces on platters of jade!'"

Always gracious, she smiled and turned and together

we went down the street, packed as at that hour it always was with envy, greed and other things that do not look nice in print, yet to which she seemed indifferent or else unconscious . . .

She said nothing and her silence was very confidential. It was as though she were saying to me, We talk the same tongue and in that tongue there is no need for speech.

Silence has its licenses and I am sure she had no intention of according me any. The trick of eye, of look, of way, the arts rehearsed before a mirror, the little spells a girl may cast, if only for practise, she disdained or else ignored. Her silence may or may not have been confidential. It was not provocative.

In the gastronomic El Dorado which presently we entered, her attitude changed necessarily. Yet it was I who spoke first and not to her but to the waiter.

When he had gone, she said with that irrelevance which is always so apropos:

"And the ghost story?"

Ten minutes earlier Cally had shaken the keys of Destiny at me. I was yet to learn that the Urim and Thummim were then in her hands from which she was shedding the gloves.

The gloves were white, her costume was dark, admirably made, equally simple. I lack the huxter's eye but I knew it was not a bargain, and suddenly I recaptured a sensation which I had not experienced for years, that of intimate association with a charming and beautiful girl.

At once, and with the same irrelevance, I began about a house in which I had lived.

"The house was back from the road. The door-

way extended up to and through the second story. Before the house was a high wall of grey stone. Above was a grey sky. Under the house was a cellar, which is the usual place for a cellar, but beneath it was another cellar. In the second cellar were barrels. In the barrels was gold."

"Yours?"

"I do not know. I do not know where the house is. I do not know how long ago I lived there. As a child, the memory of it was vivid. It seemed as neighbourly as the day before. Perhaps it was. Time is very relative. It may be that there is no such thing. Kant said that. Kant said that time is a category of the intellect. As a child I did not know it. As a child it seemed to me that I had just come from that house of which my people knew nothing. Since then I have realised that I lived there in a previous existence. But I have always felt that I shall find the house again and just now I felt that when I do find it, I shall find in it a girl who will look like you."

"A compliment should be brief. That is the most elaborate compliment I ever heard."

She smiled as she said it, but she smiled as much at the waiter as at me. The waiter was showing her, not the plovers' eggs that carelessly I had promised, but a salmi Sardanapale.

When he had served it, she said: "That is the great advantage of being a novelist. A novelist can imagine things that never happened, that never could happen, but which are real to him."

Without transition, as though wanting to get away from it, she added: "This salmi must have been cooked in a jewelled pan."

Leisurely I drew her back. "You are entirely right, but so too am I. Epictetus advised us to cheat ourselves and dream. But do we cheat ourselves when we recall what we did in a previous life? From the majority, any and all memory of it is withheld. That is very merciful. If people remembered what they did when they were here before, a hundred and one out of ninety-nine would go mad."

Whether it were that last word that prompted, or whether it were due to unconscious telepathy, I do not know and I do not believe she knew either, but, dismissing the subject, she said:

"How is Mr. Bradish?"

"I was just coming from his physician when I met you. He said that Bradish has a lesion that may result in cerebral deglutinisation. That's a bit stiff. Until latterly, Bradish was the sanest man I knew. But latterly he went quite mad over Nelly Chilton and while I do not blame him for that—how can I when you are her living image?—yet, assuming that he recovers, then when he learns she is gone and gone too just when he had her, it might topple him completely."

She nodded understandingly and stood up. She was going, she had much to do she said, as she thanked me, and I saw her to the door, to the eager sunshine, to the crowd that took her and hid her away. Behind me, from an orchestra in the restaurant, came a strain sweet and slow. I had never heard it before. I heard it afterward. I heard it every time I thought of her until I saw her again, which then was a long way off.

XII

SINCE then, in looking back, it has seemed to me that the Daughters of Hazard that threw Nelly Chilton into a stone vault, sank Bradish into depths where Death alone could follow, and then, because there are other depths, depths which only the living can enter, because he had not suffered enough, because he must suffer more, recalled him that he might know what pain is.

Then it was that, in the voids where he lay, an artery reached and drew him. His scattered senses, satisfied with their temporary decentralisation, resisted. During the subtle struggle, fought in a dim corridor of the brain, a memory stirred and spoke. Along the corridor two syllables sounded remotely. They were as taps on a damp drum beaten obscurely behind the shelves of thought. They awoke no echo, evoked no image. Drifted by the currents of unconsciousness, they passed. But the currents, barred by assembling ideas, broke to their murmur. A memory that had gone, looked back. The taps on the drum sounded less dumbly. From behind the shelves of thought a face peered out. On the lips of the sleeper there formed a name.

"Nelly!"

His eyes opened. Before him was a woman, plain, strange, dressed after the manner of the Belle Chocolatière. His eyes closed, partially they reopened and, quite as though he were back in earlier Parisian days, he said, and distinctly enough:

"A boire!"

"Bravo!" I said when I heard of it.

Subsequently, Cally had him removed to the great white staring house where at last I went, and where I found him convalescent, collected, entirely rational, apparently as sane as before.

At the time, he was in the library and as I entered he got up and limped toward me. Loosely his clothes hung about him. The spider reduced, had paled. Then, before I could attempt to condole, for the attempt at condolence is all one can make, he surprisingly eluded it.

"These chairs are beastly. There is not a chair in the whole house that is fit to sit in. Formerly I did not notice. One chair was as good as another. But since I have been up, I find I want, well, what we all want, what I lack. I must send Peters around to pick up something decent."

I lit a cigarette. "See here, old chap, you will be having a birthday soon. Sensible people have birthdays all the time. I'll give you one."

"What? A birthday?"

"A chair."

"You are becoming singularly generous. But I want to ask you. How did she look?"

I hesitated and he added, "I asked Cally."

"He wasn't there. I rather botched a message to him. He did not reach the manor until afterward."

"So he told me. How did she look?"

Fishing, I found the picture. "As though surrounded by the ineffable."

He held it up. I could see him visualising it. "Yes, that would be Nelly."

Still holding it, he continued, "I don't believe a word of it."

I stared. "Of what?"

"Of her death. I can't believe it."

That seemed natural and I told him so. "Of course not. If the circumstances were reversed I could not either."

Then, at once, anxious to get him away from it, I tried a twist. "Cally says what you need now is a change. He said Paris."

"Paris would not help me. I have supped on her."

"Yes, but the supper was years ago. Now it is dinner time. Before all this happened, I wrote a pantomime. I can't place it here. Recently a showman, an odiously familiar brute, clapped me on the back and said, 'Produce the stuff in Paris and I'll import the troupe.'"

Bradish shifted. "I know Chose of the Neuvelles, and if Machin has not forgotten me, I know him, too."

"At all events Emile has not forgotten you, or me either. I gave him twenty louis the last time I was there."

"Emile?"

"Don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt? Don't you remember how he used to rub his hands and ask, 'And what will ces messieurs be good enough to be willing to desire?'"

"The man at the Café Anglais?"

"Precisely. We can have Chose and Machin there and, with the champagne at their throats, one or the other will disgorge a contract. Then, on the first night, when they call for the author, you can appear and I'll shy a bouquet at you."

"I don't know that I would like that."

"Of course you will. That will be in the autumn

and, meanwhile, there is Spain and the bullfighters, and the gipsies and the cigarreras and the highwaymen and, under the stars, their little dramas of love and hate that spend themselves not in a scene but in a murder."

"That's Granada."

I saw he was getting interested and I was about to strum another air when Peters appeared.

We went in to luncheon, during which I kept talking of the Andalusia I knew and loved, sending his thoughts skimming afar; promenading him along the crocus and pink Delicias; seating him before the castagnettes and guitars; showing him the flamenco; the slim, twisting waists, the eyes burning above butterfly fans; scenting it all with the odour of almonds, the smell of grape.

He looked up. "When could you go?"

"This minute. Call a cab."

"You seem to have a Golconda of enthusiasm! What do you say to a shot at next week?"

"*Ole tu madre!* Hurrah for your mother!"

Behind the hurrah, a hallelujah followed. There he sat, white, gaunt, shaken, sane. Save for the remark that he did not believe the dead was dead, a remark qualified by the supplement that he could not believe it, he had said nothing that was not humdrum, commonplace, normal. Previously, I had thought that with time, in which everything breaks, wears itself out, passes away, resignation would come and forgetfulness with it. But though he still remembered and thought, too, the memory must have been poignant, already he was resigned. So I thought. That opinion I shortly and entirely altered.

XIII

ON the floor were cigarettes, boots, books, shirts, coats, trousers, enough for a trunk, a big trunk, and, as I hate trunks, I was meditating how to get it all into a bag. The problem was pretty, it partook of geometry which I also hate. In similar circumstances a poet would have omitted to meditate. A poet would have called for his harp and composed a song. But I am a practical man and I decided that if, but this once, I could stuff everything in, for the next few months Peters, or Gedney, or both, would attend to the stuffing.

Then again came the rattle of Destiny's keys. At the time I did not know it. I mistook the shaken keys for a tradesman knocking, bill in hand, at my door. As I was out of commission, copyless, with nothing more commercial in my head than the fringes of that ghost story, I did not swear, I did not care. I went on and opened.

There was Bradish.

Not for a moment had I imagined it was he and I stared.

"What have you done with your earthquake?"

He limped in, limped along to the workshop, sat down, tapped at his teeth.

I waved at the floor. "You couldn't loan me Peters for an hour, could you?"

Whether he heard or not is unimportant. He had been looking down, he looked up and bit at his underlip. As I afterward thought, he was steadying it. Then it came.

"I have seen her."

I, too, sat down. "Seen whom?"

"Nelly."

Until then I had not noticed the spider. It was so violently red that I wondered if he had been drinking and I tried to humour him.

"Yes, of course. Occasionally I see her also."

"I tell you I actually saw her."

I thought of Aly Bolton and I said, "Look here, old chap, you have seen someone who resembles her."

He got up, took a cigarette from the floor, lit it, sat down again.

"Nobody resembles her. In all the world she is unique."

Well, you are wrong, I thought, but I said: "There is no such thing as mystery, there is only ignorance and with that I am abundantly supplied."

Yet, as I said that, I told myself that whomever he had seen could not be Aly Bolton. She had gone.

Gloomily he flicked his ashes: "I suppose you think me crazy."

I smiled at him. "I would think you abnormal if you were not. In open court here, Spitzka, testifying as an expert, said that all men are insane. In France, Janet said the same thing. Do you object to the evidence?"

He laughed fiercely. "Not if it includes you."

Glad that he laughed, I laughed also. "Well, then, the company I am in is nothing to boast of. But seriously now, you know as well as I do, and probably better, that alcohol or morphine can produce hallucinations which, though actually seen, represent merely the observer's mental condition."

He shook the cigarette. "You are talking rubbish.

I don't drink, at least not to excess, and I don't take morphine, though I have had enough to drive me to it."

"Yes, I know. But I know too that any strong emotion can have the same result. Why, good Lord! everybody knows that the attendants at morgues have to be on their guard against the false identification of the dead. People go there distracted by grief at the loss of a relative and with the image of that relative so glued to the retina that they identify the first body they see."

He gave a sort of groan. "I did not come here to exchange stupidities, my mind is clear as a bell."

"And so you will admit was Balzac's. Balzac intended to give Gautier a horse. He forgot to, but he talked so much about it that he believed he had given it and used to ask Gautier how the horse behaved. From that you can realise what the imagination is. You imagine you have seen the dead, whereas you know that that is impossible."

"Impossible?" he angrily repeated. "Time and again I have heard you say that the word ought to be kicked out of the dictionary."

"Well, except in connection with pure mathematics, so it should be. If, as Huxley said, we understood all that is implied in so common an instance as an object that falls, we would not doubt the possibility of any occurrence however incredible. At the same time——"

"See here, I am not drunk or doped or a novelist. I don't care what Huxley said, what you say, what anyone says. I saw her."

Argument weakens all things. I yielded.

"Very good then, where was it?"

"In the Park."

"In the Park! How in the Park?"

He fumbled and produced some papers. "I had been to the French line. They hadn't much, but I got the captain's cabin, the first officer's cabin. Here they are. On the way up, the car took the Park. Near the carousal I saw her. She was alone. She was on foot. I got out. There were people just ahead of her. As I got out she passed beyond them. For a moment, I lost sight of her. There are steps there. They lead to a lake. I thought she must be on them. From the top you can see all around and I looked everywhere. Not a sign of her. She had vanished. Like that!"

"Hold on! Did you see anyone you might have mistaken for her?"

"I could not mistake children for her, could I? Or old women, or nursemaids, or babies, or a boy in a boat on the lake? No. I mistook no one for her. Believe me or not, it was she."

I, too, helped myself to a cigarette from the floor. As I lighted it, I nodded at him.

"But I want to believe you, only—and for heaven's sake don't think I am jesting—only you would have made it a bit easier if you had said you had seen her at night, in the old-fashioned way, at the foot of your bed, sticking her tongue at you."

He shook his head. "It was not her ghost, if that's what you mean. It was she, alive, Nelly Chilton in flesh and blood."

When he said that I was less eager to have that poor vagrant of a word kicked out of the dictionary. What he said was impossible and yet, as I had to recognise,

for the impossibility of it there was a good measure of excuse. The sum total of all he knew about her death was hearsay. He had been flying along with her in the open and, without transition, he was in bed, a strange woman looking at him. Of intervening events he had no knowledge whatever. There were not only no intervening events, there was not even an intervening blankness. The last instant before he lost consciousness and the first instant when he recovered it, met and fused. Mercifully he had felt nothing, heard nothing, seen nothing. Since then he had felt and acutely. He had heard, and crushingly. But of the anterior moments and hours and days and weeks and all that had been packed into them, he had but the evidence of his own injuries and such information as others supplied.

Supported by the injuries, the information was credible. But human nature does not always accept the merely credible. That which, in nearly killing him, had thoroughly killed her, constituted a shock so overwhelming that he had not assimilated it. In any catastrophe there is always a sense of unreality and the seeming unreality of the girl's death must have been with him until just then, a little before, when in the Park, the sight of someone had accentuated the unreality and convinced him, at any rate for the time being, that she was not dead, but alive. After all, he had not seen her, as I had, in her coffin, and of those who had seen her, I was his only witness.

"Where is Mrs. Chilton?" I asked.

"Somewhere in France. My lawyers have the address. Why do you ask?"

"And Mrs. Trefusis?"

"Newport, I fancy. What do you want of her?"

"If Mrs. Chilton were in town I would ask you to see her. As she is not and as Mrs. Trefusis is away, I do wish you would see Austen or Renwick, or somebody."

"What good would it do?"

"Jim, look here. At present I am the only one you have talked to who was at the funeral. I wish you would talk to some of the others. They could only substantiate what I have told you, but what I have told you has not been enough. What you would hear from them would be cumulative and convincing. You would know from it that you are mistaken about what you saw, or thought you saw, in the Park. Besides I dare say Cally could explain it."

"I dare say he could. But he and the seven sages in active collaboration could not explain it away."

"I am not so sure. Cally told me you had a lesion of the occipital cortex. At the time he did not know, or professed not to know, how it might result. My own ignorance being unfathomable, I looked it up and I found that in cases such as yours there may be an impairment of vision."

"Yes, that's true. At first I could not distinguish objects very clearly, but that has gone. I can see now as well as ever."

"No doubt you think so. Lots of people are colour-blind and have not the slightest suspicion of it."

"Yes, and lots of people are stupid and don't suspect it either. But their stupidity does not affect me. I saw her. There is not the peradventure of a doubt about it."

Mentally, at that, I threw up my hands. I did not

know what to say and, before I could determine, he was at it from another angle.

"I want you to help me."

Theoretically, it is a privilege to help anyone. Actually, it is the guano of ingratitude. Yet, weak as water, I nodded at him.

"Well, then, since she was in the Park today, she may be there tomorrow. It was about noon when I saw her and tomorrow at eleven I shall station myself at the top of the steps and I want you to be at the bottom. Will you?"

It was sheer insanity but, though insanity has always appealed to me, I did not at once agree.

"Assuming, not for argument's sake, but just to avoid one, that it was your wife you saw, it is not cricket to trap her. If it was a ghost your attitude should be equally correct."

"But it is she who is not running straight."

"All the more reason then why you should."

He got up, lit another cigarette and began limping about. It seemed to me that I had tangled him and, with my usual weakness, I switched.

"I'll go you. If I see her, I will salute her. If you see her, you will of course do the same. But if I were you, and mind you I am not, but if I were, I would stop there. To attempt in any way to detain or address her, unless she invites it, would be an evil act."

He turned on me. "I can't see where the evil would be."

"Yes, you do, you see perfectly. You know it would show a total lack of consideration for her personal independence. If Renwick had not mumbled a dozen phrases over you both, you would never dream of it.

Because he did, that does not make her your thing. But all this is utter nonsense. You did not see her and what you did not see, you will not see again. None the less I'll go you. I'll go you because I hate the humdrum and love the insane."

I broke off and added: "Can you loan me Peters for a minute or two?"

"Peters? Yes. Certainly. What do you want him for?"

"You may not know it, but he is a genius. He can pack. It is more than I can do."

"Pack! Pack for what?"

"Sevilla! Granada! Cadiz! There are the tickets, I'll toss you now. What did you pay? I'll toss you and give you a cheque for the one I lose."

"Oh!" he said longingly. "You are still going, are you?"

"Of course I am and so are you."

"Not now, not until I find Nelly."

I could not budge him. I tried, but not very hard. I knew the harder I tried the more mulish he would become, but I knew, too, that if I said little or nothing, sooner or later he would veer, suggest whatever I had and believe the suggestion his own. Not a very original process perhaps, but I have found it the only way in which one can live in comfort with unoriginal people.

Consequently I threw up the sponge. "All right, Granada will keep. But you're mad, mad as a hatter, mad as two hatters, mad as Lincoln and Bennett."

"Then you will be there at eleven tomorrow?"

"I will be there at ten fifty-nine."

He limped along. I saw him out, heard him lumber

down the stair, crossed the landing and rang at Aly Bolton's door.

It opened and a frowsy lady said: "Are you the gasman?"

"Yes," I replied. "But not your gasman and, believe me, I deplore it deeply."

"Get along with you. What do you want?"

"Miss Bolton's address."

The lady displayed the most distressing mouth I ever saw.

"Are you meaning the party as was here? I never seen her. Likely the janitor can tell you. Is it a bill?"

"For the rent"—in my heart, I would have added but she closed the door.

XIV

FOR the purposes of that story of mine, already I had looked over the papers published by the Society for Psychical Research and, greatly to my amazement, discovered what I already knew, that the ego persists after death. But evidence of the persistence of the ego is not evidence that it revisits the glimpses of the moon. In the whole interminable set of records there is not one authoritatively established ghost.

And yet, either Bradish had seen a ghost or else he was mad.

It is true he might have been lying and I would have given him the benefit of that doubt if I had known him less long and less well. It was not that he could not lie and did not lie, for he did lie, as we all have to lie, out of consideration and civility if nothing else. But in

his cock-and-bull story I knew that he had been telling, not the truth certainly, but what was truth to him.

I got up from the table, to which I had returned from the frowsy lady, and kicked my clothes about.

But good Lord! I mentally exclaimed. What ponderable reason have I for saying that it is not the truth? The fact that there has been no authoritatively established ghost does not prove that there cannot be one.

Dissatisfied with the reductio, I kicked again and tried to look at the matter from the angle of insanity. Cally had waved that flag. Yet, apart from the determination with which Bradish had clung to the idea that he had seen Nelly Chilton, he seemed normal as you please, to me at least, but while I knew precious little about insanity, I did know that the presence of an idea, fixed and erroneous, is the surest proof of dementia. The idea might therefore show that he was mad, unless, of course, it were not erroneous.

But that is nonsense, I decided. He did not see the the dead, he did not see a ghost. If he saw anybody, it was Aly Bolton, and yet how could he? She is not here.

But I am here, I disgustedly reflected, and what is worse, I argue with myself. I don't wonder the frowsy lady mistook me for a gasman.

Then back to me, from over the way, the possibility trotted. It might be Aly Bolton. Apparently she had gone. On the other hand, she might not have. She had said she was going and though clearly she had vacated the walkup, it did not follow that she had vacated New York. Then, suddenly, I realised that I knew nothing whatever about her, realised also, and

for the first time, that while seemingly frank as an open newspaper, actually she might be secretive as a sealed book.

Exceedingly lovely, clothed in riddles, in her two-by-four flat, she had been out of place as a piano in a pantry. Her natural atmosphere was the spaciousness of some spacious domain. What she had was the stuffiness of a furniture shop. That in itself was incongruous. Yet, apart from it, where did she go? what did she do? For all I knew to the contrary, privately she might be a Borgia and publicly a bacchante. She suggested none of these things. What she did suggest was a soul singularly evolved. But even though she were not, even though she were no better than the law allows, her charm prevailed. That charm had inundated me. Because of it I knew, whatever she might be, that always before her my hat would sweep the ground.

When a man does not feel that way, he has no feeling at all. One might say he is callous.

None the less mystery surrounded her and I wondered if I had the right to probe it. She had been living there, across the hall, beautiful and solitary at night, looking like a princess and dressed for the rôle and, by day, associated with a furniture shop. It was not only incongruous, it was curious. It suggested that complexity which dual personality is, and yet which all problematic natures possess.

In considering the matter, it occurred to me that while I had no right to lift any of her veils, to even touch them for purposes of my own, yet, for Bradish's sake, perhaps I should. If I could lead him up to her, the shock he would get would be as pronounced as the

one at my doorbell and far more effective, for definitely it would lay that ghost.

I reached for my hat, took a pair of gloves, stuck a stick under my arm and went down the stair.

On the main floor was the den of the janitor, a dirty, wild-hearted little man with a hostile and drooping eye. Long since I had tamed him. A dollar here, a cigar there, and he had become a watch dog, barking that I had moved, that I was dead, guarding me from interruptions.

"Tell me, pretty maiden," I said when I got at him. "What is Miss Bolton's address?"

He did not know. But he knew her place of business. It was a furniture store on Fortieth Street near Fifth Avenue.

In an hour I found the shop, which had the air of a Franco-Chinese bazaar. Among other curios was a chair that stretched its arms to me. Pending the attentions of a clerk with shiny hair and a shiny moustache, I accepted the chair's embraces. At the moment, the clerk was talking to a woman, a topnotcher, I thought, Mrs. Amsterdam for all I knew to the contrary, but presently he bowed her out and I asked for Miss Bolton's address.

"Miss Bolton? Never heard of her."

"Here is her picture then. A beautiful young woman, beautifully dressed, who speaks with a foreign intonation. She is connected with your firm. Where is she?"

"Oh, yes! I recognise the picture. But—er—she was with us under another name."

I shifted. "This is a decent chair. Send it to Mr. Bradish."

"Mr. James Bradish?"

I nodded.

"Is this Mr. Bradish?" he asked, looking, I could see, for the spider of which all New York was aware.

"No, but if he likes the chair, I will pay for it."

"Yes, sir. May I ask your name?"

I gave it, the Buck Club with it and added, "Well, where is the lady?"

He smoothed that moustache. "She—er—she dissociated herself from us just when Mr. Delatour was sending her abroad. I believe she is in Montreal—or is it Toronto?"

I could not tell him and he went back among tall bahuts, silk tapestries, porcelain monsters, and I saw him lean over a table.

Twelve hours away, I thought. If she is away!

But he was returning. "I don't seem to find it. Mr. Delatour may know. He is out now, I will ask him."

I got up.

He saw me out. "Yes, sir, it will be attended to and the chair also."

As the lift took me, I could have sworn that the lady of the steps was Aly Bolton. From the start I could have sworn it and would have sworn it, sworn it at Bradish, had I not believed she was in Paris and I know of no normal process whereby a young woman can be in two places at once. Or any normal process either whereby she can have two names and no address.

I was on the avenue by this time, looking in at shops that were filled with things I did not want. What I did want was a bite. I made for Sherry's, changed my

mind, boarded a bus and got out at Bradish's corner.

In the hall was Peters and I asked him to get me a sandwich.

"And a glass of Madeira, sir."

Already Gedney had told me that Bradish was in the reception-room, and at once, as I entered that chamber of horrors, I discovered him at the window, standing there, looking out, a thing which a gentleman never does.

He turned and explained it. "I am on the watch now, you know."

"Well, you need not be. I have got it."

We went on in to the library and seating myself I added: "Also I have a chair for you. I thought it very comfortable. I thought it more than comfortable. It was what you might call a 'varsity chair. It was highly instructive."

"You have heard something."

"Rather a long story, too. But perhaps it won't bore you. There is a young woman hereabouts who might be——"

He had it away from me before I could get it out.

"Nelly's twin. She is employed at Delatour's. Nelly told me about her. If that is your story, what is true in it is not new."

"But look here——"

"Oh, I'm looking and I propose to keep at it. Here are your sandwiches. I hope they will seem more appetising to you than that story has to me. Did you think I would swallow it?"

Peters had put a tray before me and gone. The sandwiches went quite as quickly.

Smoking, he watched me and puffed. "Nelly said

the resemblance was confined to the profile and colouring. She said the Delatour girl was more fragile and slimmer. I remember just the way she put it, 'She's me etherealised.' "

"In duodecimo," I threw out. "Yes, that's true. None the less——"

"You thought I could mistake one for the other. Never."

I pushed at the tray and he sat down and shoved a box at me.

"Have a cigar. You will be there tomorrow?"

"Yes, and the day after. As often as you like. But I think you are wrong. I think it was the Delatour girl, as you call her. I would have said so this morning, only I thought her in Paris."

"And thought me insane."

"Look here, Jim, either you are cracked or else you saw a ghost. There are no two ways about it."

"But you are ridiculous with your ghost. I never heard such rot."

"Ever heard of Carlyle then? 'Ghosts,' the old duffer said, 'nigh a thousand million of them walk the earth at noon.' "

"Carlyle was capable of anything, except decent English. He never saw one of his ghosts or you either."

"It is a pretty question. In England almost every old family has a ghost. A ducal family has two ghosts. You know about the Crookes ménage, don't you?"

"Who the deuce is Crookes?"

"An ordinary person who discovered thallium, invented the radiometer and foretold the x-ray."

"The chemist?"

"From what I hear, he is passionless as algebra. Now he said, 'I do not say such things may be, I say such things are.' "

"He did not say it about ghosts then."

"You are quite right. He said it about a spirit materialised by a medium, a very pretty spirit, a spirit that called herself Katie King, gave him her photograph, a lock of her hair and sat in his lap, sat in it not once, but a hundred times. I am not making this up, it is all down somewhere."

"I don't believe it."

"Of course you don't. You believe in the reality of things. You believe there is heat, you believe there is cold. There is neither heat nor cold. There is merely vibration and the brain to translate it. You believe there is light, you believe there is colour. There is no light, there are no colours. There is only matter and motion and the optic nerve. On the other hand you don't believe in illusions. Of all illusions the real is the greatest."

"Here! Help yourself to the Madeira but spare me your Fichte and brandy."

"Very good then, consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin and you have seen them in their ideal condition. But you have not heard them grow into it. That is because your ears are not attuned to their vibrations. If they were, you would precious soon discover the noise they make. Because you are not deaf, you don't believe it. Because you are not blind you believe there can be nothing that is not obvious. It is the obvious alone that is illusory."

"In the Park today, Nelly was perfectly obvious, with nothing illusory about her."

"Except when she vanished."

"I did not say she vanished. I said——"

"You said you saw her one minute and could not see her the next. Isn't that what you told me?"

"Well, yes, but——"

"Look here, old chap, a crustacean extracts from the water material wherewith to make a shell. From grain a bird produces feathers and an elephant produces ivory. These processes are marvellous. But they are so common that we accept them as a matter of course. Yet, in view of them, it is quite conceivable that the disincarnate can so utilise particles and elements of the air that materialisation ensues. Materialisation can be even forced upon them. The dead can be raised. It is true it takes black magic to do it and nowadays who believes in that sort of thing? I am sure I did not until occultism taught me better. Given certain conditions and the dead can be raised. Given others and they can raise themselves. There are more things in heaven and earth, Jim Bradish Horatio——"

"Beg pardon, sir."

In the doorway Gedney stood and with him a man and that chair from which I had set forth to tell Bradish what he knew beforehand. It was a mocking chair.

But now, stretching its arms at Bradish, he too let it embrace him.

He turned to me. "Jolly good. Where did you find it?"

"At Delatour's."

He turned to the man. "Tell Delatour if he has another like it to send it here."

In a moment, when the man had gone, he turned again to me.

"Very nice of you, I'm sure. Was it from that girl you got it?"

"Lord, no. I didn't see her."

"How did you know then about the resemblance?"

"She had a flat across the way from mine."

"At your confounded walkup?"

"Where else? I am not maintaining two establishments. But she saw you there once and said you had a beautiful nature. She was entirely wrong. None the less you might cultivate one."

"I think I am cultivating one. I have accepted your chair with gratitude and your remarks with charity. What more would you have?"

"Abandon this whole thing. If you are not cracked already it will drive you crazy."

"Beg pardon, sir."

There was Gedney again, this time with a card on a salver.

Bradish looked at the card, looked at me.

"A man with some leases. They won't take long."

He got up and limped into the chamber of horrors. On the table beside me was *The Dawn*, a novel by Bil Sayers, which the junior member of the house that published my rubbish told me had sold to the tune of sixty thousand copies.

Idly I opened it. Instantly the room dissolved. I was wandering afar in a fancy ball of the imagination, one in which I felt unworthy to tie the latches of the writer's shoes. The ball he gave suggested a Baudelarian masquerade conducted by Gautier; the dual surprises that only a magician of letters can create; the

words glued to the idea and the idea a winged thing. With the name of a prize fighter, Bil Sayers had the pen of a witch.

But the room reassembled its atoms. Bradish reappeared. Yet it may be he had lingered too long in the chamber of horrors. It may be that some of its atmosphere had permeated him. He startled me with the first thing he said.

"What did you mean by saying the dead can be raised?"

"Merely that and nothing more."

"How is it done?"

"Only the initiate know. But I understand that among the requisites are incantations, chemicals and buckets of blood."

"And the dead rise from the buckets?"

"With the blood and other substances the spirit materialises."

He had been standing. He sat down in the chair I had given him, reached for the book I had put on the table, fidgeted with it and shoved it back.

"And you say it has been done?"

"Read your *Æschylus*. In the *Persians* there is an account reasonably circumstantial and tolerably terrific. Since then, there have been a number of instances. Only the other day I saw an account of one in the *London Times*. It told of a séance at the Winter Palace where a Thibetan lama evoked for the tsar the spirit of Alexander II."

"His grandfather? The chap who was bombed? I don't believe it."

"How admirable you are today. You ask for infor-

mation. The prettiest girl in all the world can only give you what she's got."

But there was Gedney again. Someone else had come and I reached for my hat.

"Tomorrow at eleven?" he said when he saw I was going.

"On the dot."

XV

THE next morning I went to the roof. About me were fastidious tokens, the subsurface garments of my neighbours. In the street were hurrying insects. Above, indifferent to the idiot agitations of man, serenely the sun looked down. It reminded me of Brahma, who knows the nothingness of all.

But the sun, that is a divine lecturer, is also a heavenly clock. The hour of my rendezvous with the quick, perhaps also with the dead, was approaching. I threw myself down the stairs and ultimately reached the Park, where I found Bradish gazing, as Janus gazed, two ways at once.

Amicably he greeted me. "You are always late."

Inimically I answered him. "You look like a god."

Bolstered by a stone pillar, he stood at the top of a flight of steps. Beneath was a path that girdled a miasmatic lake. The path was punctuated with the exclamation points of trees, between which, at spaced intervals, were arbours, vine-covered, filled with mosquitoes. At the foot of the steps, three children shouted as only American children do shout. Along the path a man strolled, his hands behind his back,

talking to himself. Otherwise, at the moment, there was no one.

Along the top of the steps were nurses, prams, old women. Beyond, on the road, were cars, victorias, girls on horseback. Across the road, more trees.

Bradish looked at his watch, which was always wrong.

"It's eleven-thirty," he informed me. "Now," he authoritatively added, "you go down there."

At the foot of the steps, I gave the shouting children a quarter and invited them to hasten elsewhere in search of lollypops, of which I hoped they would sicken and die. At once the man who had been talking to himself began talking at me. There are times when if I cannot answer rudely, I do not answer at all. This was one of them. The shouting children had got me on edge. Besides it seemed imbecile to stand waiting for someone who would never come, for something that could never happen.

I lit a cigarette. My talkative friend had moved on. The children had gone. But now, at the right, people appeared, tourists I judged, quite a lot of them, talking in that rasping voice which is one of my beloved country's many specialties and dressed in a fashion that is another. I looked at the miasmatic lake in which were intrepid ducks and suddenly I turned. I had heard Bradish.

At the top of the steps, his limping foot may have slipped. I could see him, one hand on the balustrade, pulling himself up, motioning at me with the other. But I saw, too, something else. Descending the steps was Nelly Chilton—she, or her ghost.

Dumbfounded, I gasped but I rallied, dropped my cigarette, raised my hat. At that instant she was midway on the steps above me. Whether or not she saw me I could not tell. She ignored me as only an entirely well-bred woman can ignore a man whom she does not wish to notice.

I stared. She was nearer then than the instant before and, in staring, I was conscious of three distinct and practically simultaneous impressions. First, that she was not Nelly Chilton but Aly Bolton; second, that she was neither the one nor the other; third, that whoever she might be, she was livid.

Confused by the conflicting impressions, I looked up at Bradish, looked without consciously seeing him, looked again at her, for her, rather. She was no longer there. During the shift of my eyes she had vanished.

The tourists then were directly in front of me. One of them, a man, was asking me something. I flung him aside, flung myself through the others, flung myself beyond and looked. Not a trace! On the other side of the path were bushes. No one! Nearby was an arbour. Empty!

I turned. Bradish, red as a tomato, was limping along the path. Behind him the tourists, bunched together, were rasping angrily at me. I was sorry to have appeared uncivil, but I was not in the humour to say so. I had my hands full with Bradish. Without his hat, passing and repassing a hand on his head, his mouth working, that spider venomously active, before me he stood, unable to speak, congested by emotion.

"Come here."

I got him in the arbour, got him seated, killed a few mosquitoes and asked if his car was waiting. I do not think he heard. He was stuttering something, what I could not make out, something to the effect that my Nelly was dead.

I never had a Nelly. Otherwise it was curious. Bradish, six feet tall, ordinarily nerveless as a stone wall, was shaking like a frightened girl.

In those remote days, brandy was to be had in the Park and very bad brandy it was. But there are times and seasons when bad brandy is better than none. This was one of them. I thought, My kingdom for a pony! His house, though, was very neighbourly. Rather than the hazards of sylvan bars, it seemed to me safer to get him there.

"See here," I said. "If you came on foot, we'll find a cab."

Again he passed a hand over his head. "Where is my hat?"

"Probably on the steps."

He got up. I put a hand under his elbow. He shook it off and limped along.

The tourists then had gone. The children I had hoped were dead had returned, dirtier, noisier, not sick but sticky. They were having a rough and tumble on the steps, from the top of which, Fletcher, who had succeeded Mike, was looking down.

By this time Bradish had himself in hand. In the car he said nothing but at his house he distributed various orders.

"Except to Dr. Cally I am not at home."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Something to eat and drink in the library. Anything."

"Brandy," I threw in.

"And curaçoa," Bradish added.

Brandy and curaçoa make very good medicine. I applauded the prescription. Apart from which, I have often wondered how it was that in questioning his sanity, I did not question my own. For presently, after his servants had come and gone, and we had both dosed ourselves and he went back into it, I followed his lead, not head over heels perhaps, but with relative confidence.

The lead he gave was, at first, merely an indication.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I don't know what to make of it, except that whoever the lady of the steps may have been, neither of us ever saw her before."

He lit a cigar, puffed at it, lit it again.

"You are right. Neither of us has seen a ghost. Yesterday when you spoke of one, I thought it ridiculous. I did not believe it possible. I do now, though. No, I still do not believe it possible and yet I have to believe it. My eyes deny what my ears affirm."

I exclaimed at him. "Your ears! What have your ears to do with it?"

He was relighting his cigar and I doubled on him. "Look here! What in the world did you go and tumble over for?"

"It was her doing."

"How her doing? You don't mean she knocked you down?"

"In that beastly hole where we sat, I told you about it. You seemed more interested in the mosquitoes."

"Tell me again then."

"She was almost on me when I saw her. That was just before you did the football work through those people. To tell you the honest truth I did not expect to see her. I hoped I might. I did not believe I would. When she came on me, like that, I started, and she did, too. Yesterday, I don't think she saw me. But, today, when she did see me, she gave a sort of start and I was so overcome I out with something, 'Nelly!' or, 'My Nelly!' and tried to touch her. I know I stretched my hand toward her. She edged away, drew her head back and said, and said it from the tips of her lips, but as plainly as I am talking to you, 'Your Nelly is dead.' You remember how she used to look. She had a skin of cream with claret in it. At that instant she looked as though she did not have a drop of blood. I started again to approach her. Already she was hurrying down the steps. I slipped on a bit of orange peel and called to you."

It was rather rattling. To clarify it, I said, "You are sure she spoke?"

"There is no question about it. When I said 'Nelly!' or 'My Nelly!' she said, and said it as though she were annoyed, 'Your Nelly is dead.'"

"The devil!"

At the moment I found but that. Yet immediately I had it, or thought I had it, and I gave it to him.

"In that arbour, it occurred to me that when I went through those people and was headed one way, she had already taken the other."

"Supposing she had. I don't see how it matters."

"If what you tell me is true, I mean if you did not imagine it, it matters everything. What you saw

and I saw was not a ghost. Ghosts may or may not appear, but, assuming they do appear, they don't talk. They cannot. The physical organs are lacking."

I could see him turning it over. Then he, too, had it, or thought he had it, and he gave it to me.

"Hold on! You told me that the spirit that sat in Crookes' lap said her name was Katie King. She must have talked to tell it."

"Yes, and for that matter I have had a spirit talk to me. In Boston, at a séance, a spirit bobbed up right in front of me. As she was young and pretty, or at least seemed so in the darkened room, I put an arm around her and she bleated, 'Don't, don't!' and cuddled closer. While I was hugging her, the medium barked like a bulldog, 'Young man! Don't you take liberties with Bright Eyes.' Then Miss Bright Eyes slipped from my arms and disaggregated through the floor."

I laughed as I said it, as one does in telling a thing of that sort, but it did not amuse Bradish. Gloomily he smoked and I gave the story its proper perspective.

"But look here, Bright Eyes and Katie King and any other mediumistically materialised spirit is not a ghost. A spirit is a physical exteriorisation of the medium's psychism. Apart from the medium, it has no existence whatever. On the other hand, a ghost, the old-fashioned ghost, had its own entity, its own volition. Like the wind, it came and went as it listed. But, except in novels, it never talked. How could it?"

Bradish got up and stamped about. An old trick of his, it had always annoyed me. But on this day, occupied as I was with what a German would call the being and the non-being, nothing mattered except the key to the riddle which had complicated itself by

becoming a problem with an enigma added. The lady of the steps constituted the problem. Was she or was she not a ghost? In either case, who was she? In the latter query was the enigma.

The practically simultaneous impressions that I had derived from her, vividly confusing as they were at the moment, had since become less distinct. Of them all the third, being the last, was the strongest and I told myself that while the apparition might impossibly be Nellie Chilton, might possibly have been Aly Bolton, more probably it was a fair unknown.

Yet, in that event, why had she said that Nelly was dead? How, for that matter had she come to say it? Above all why the *de haut en bas* attitude? Assuming it were Nelly Chilton, assuming it were Aly Bolton, assuming it were a third and unknown quantity, what had Bradish done to be spoken to with such loftiness? He was a good sort and his attitude to the departed had been impeccable. Why then the air of saying, Villain, unhand me?

At that, quite like the mosquitoes on the lake, an idea hummed and bit.

I looked up at Bradish.

"Jim, would you mind continuing your promenade sitting down? I have something to ask you."

He turned to me. "Well, what?"

"You remember the ladylike dressmaker with the cheque. What did you tell them at the manor about him?"

It was a bit far away. It took him a moment to get there. In the process he sat down.

"I don't see why you want to go back into that. But if it is any benefit to you, I got Mrs. Chilton alone

and put the matter before her. She took it to Nelly. When she returned she said Nelly would marry me."

"So I assumed. But just what did you tell Mrs. Chilton?"

"What Peters told me, that he had gone with you to Bonheur and that the scoundrel would not budge."

At that, I too got up and stamped about. I stamped the harder because I did not know what to say. Truth should be agreeable or else withheld. To have told him that Nelly Chilton had agreed to marry him solely because of circumstances which she was distressingly unaware no longer existed or which, if they had ever existed, existed only in her mother's imagination, to have told him that would have been tantamount to hitting him over the head.

"Well, why do you ask?" I heard him say.

I stopped and turned. "Oh, nothing."

"Nothing, eh? Then you have a mighty queer way of asking mighty queer questions about it."

I had turned away, I turned again. "The whole thing is queer. I am trying to get the rights of it. From the manner in which the lady of the steps spoke to you, it seems to me that she must have felt herself aggrieved."

"About what, in God's name?"

"She may have got the idea that the Bonheur story was too bad to be true."

"But where could she have got such an idea?"

"Ah, where! That's it."

"And from whom?"

"From whom, as you say."

"Well, then?"

"I do not know where she got it, how she got it or

what she got, but from your account she appears to have, or appears to think she has, a grievance against you, if not about Bonheur, then about somebody or something else."

I sat down and he got up.

"I believe you are right."

But there now at the door was Peters.

"Dr. Cally, sir."

In he walked, the living image of the devil, and pointed a finger at Bradish.

"You're exciting yourself, my son. None of that I told you."

He nodded at me. "What's new on Parnassus?"

I got up to go. "What's new with you? Any interesting cases?"

Cally plucked at his beard. "My cases are all interesting—to the patients. But recently I had one that might interest a genius. George Eliot had a similar case in one of her novels. You, of course, could handle it better, much better. You have, what she lacked, the impressionist touch."

I knew he was guying me. None the less I walked straight into it.

"What sort of a case?"

Blandly he smiled. "Hard up for a plot? Well, some day I may give you one. But not now. Now I have to scold this young man. He seems in a very depleted condition. Been exchanging ideas with you, hasn't he?"

"Hardly that," I said, making for the door and smiling at him as I went. "Merely a tip or two. I was suggesting another physician."

XVI

IN the workshop that night I tried to solve the riddle. The enigma passed and repassed. It galloped like Flaubert's sphinx.

J'ai vu le sphinx qui fuyait. Il galopait comme un chacal.

In meditating that picture, a message reached me. Probably the result of what people who like fine words call unconscious cerebration, or of what people who like finer ones call inspiration, none the less the message seemed to originate not from within but from without. It seemed as though an invisible presence had conveyed it. Even now, though years have gone by since then, I am unable to say that it was not due to an external agency. The superjective, always potential in us, though in most of us usually dormant, may have transmitted it from one of the unseen helpers that we all have and who are most active in our behalf when we are striving, not for ourselves, but for others.

In any event and however the impact may have originated, eventually it supplied the key to the riddle, opened that door and changed three lives. The complex result was not immediate and in time much, if not all of it, would in any case have been achieved. Sooner or later all doors open, all lives change. But I believe now that the key was hidden in the message which, simple enough on the surface, told me to do what I had then no intention whatever of doing and that was to visit the Park the next day.

Châteaubriand, who knew what poetry is, said there are apparitions that visit the heart of man. They

come, as thieves and angels do, and like them depart. An apparition had visited me. It instructed and I obeyed. On the morrow, at eleven-thirty, I was again in the Park, at the foot of those steps.

I had no plan of any kind, which often is the best plan of all. I had thought that when—and if—the lady appeared, I would let circumstances guide me. But though I had not planned what I would do, I had planned what I would not do. The day before she had cut me dead. Ghost or not, I did not propose to have her cut me living. If, graciously, she were so inclined and bowed, my hat would sweep the steps, and if by look or motion she intimated that I might address her, then, while I had no phrases rehearsed, I did think I might become quite talkative and not about the weather, either.

Meanwhile, on the third step from the bottom, I sat down. The dear children of the day before may have sickened at last. The tourists may have thought the Park a haunt of thugs. The talkative man who talked to himself, must have been talking elsewhere. Save for the mosquitoes I was alone. Beyond, on the miasmatic lake, a boat floated. Above was a tender turquoise and the indifferent sun. Of the lady, not a sign.

I lit a cigarette. As I tossed the match, my hand stung. From it fell a pebble. I looked up. At the top of the steps, Bradish was looking down. Then at once, as though he had no time to waste, he turned his back, a very fine back, draped beautifully in beautiful flannels.

I called at him. "*Au large, canaille.*"

Still that back and I fancied he was gazing Janus-esquely as he had gazed the day before.

Up the steps, like a chamois on Chamonix, I flew.

"See here, confound it, you will only make a mess of things as you did yesterday, whereas I——"

"You will do wonders."

"At all events, I won't lose my head and my hat and tumble over backward. If she sees you, she'll bolt, godlike that you are. But me, now, she may not notice and I can tiptoe along and see what becomes of her. It is not supposable that she will dematerialise as little Bright Eyes did when her chaperon caught me hugging her."

"You never can tell. She dematerialised yesterday. She dematerialised the day before."

"But neither of us saw her at it. Now I saw Bright Eyes perform her little act. She sank from my arms through the floor, disaggregating as she went."

"She was a fool not to have disaggregated sooner."

"I dare say. But that's not the point. If you are to stop here, I'll go. If you go, I'll hold the fort."

Bradish grabbed me by the arm. "There she is now! In that taxi!"

In the cab, almost in front of us then, I could see her, see too that she was bowing, not at both of us, not at Bradish, that bow was for me, and raising my stick in signal at the mechanician I bounded. Before I could reach her she too may have signalled. A yard or two beyond the cab stopped, a gloved hand was held out to me and my eyes were eating her face.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "Of all people! You are not the ghost of yourself, are you?"

She smiled. "No. I don't think so. Yet I may be. One never knows."

"But——"

The smile persisted. "You thought me abroad?"

"And heard you were not."

The smile passed. She was no longer looking at me, but over me, and I felt a kick. I knew it was he, confound him, and half turning, I said:

"This is Mr. Bradish, Miss Bolton."

I had seen him in any number of situations, but I had never seen him awkward before. Shy, yes, and diffident also, but awkward never, yet there he stood, fiddling with his hat, his mouth twitching like an embarrassed schoolboy.

The smile returned. "How do you do, Mr. Bradish?"

He sort of gasped, but he let go. "Thank you, thank you. Had the pleasure of seeing you here yesterday, I believe. Yesterday and the day before."

I suppose she knew what he was thinking. She usually could tell what anyone thought, that is when she wanted to, but she took it very simply.

"Yesterday and the day before I was in Canada. I am on my way now from the station."

She turned to me. "When you can you must look in at my new quarters. Signor Matouchi will be glad to see you—and you also, Mr. Bradish, should you care to come. Will you tell the man to drive on?"

Another smile and she drew back. But I poked my head in at her.

"My love to your angel and say I don't know where he lives."

She laughed and told me. It was on the west side

in the upper Eighties. As she told me, I saw travelling bags at her feet. She gave me her hand. I told the driver and fell back.

Bradish, his hat in his hand, his tail between his legs, was ambling away.

I caught up with him. "Well, sir, I hope you are satisfied. That ghost is laid."

With latent ferocity he turned on me. "Was that the Delatour girl? She doesn't resemble Nelly in the least."

"She doesn't, eh? After your telling her you saw her here yesterday and the day before! I like that!"

"I don't know that I particularly care what you like or what you don't like. At a distance there is a resemblance, I admit that. But the voice is different. This girl has a foreign intonation, a foreign look. Viennese, I should say. I did not notice that until she spoke. Then at once the slight resemblance faded. It was not she who said to me yesterday, 'Your Nelly is dead.'"

"It was not you either, I suppose, who grabbed me by the arm and said, 'There she is! There she is!'"

"I made a mistake, that's all there is to it. You needn't rub it in. Come on to the house and have luncheon."

Mentally, again I threw up the sponge. In trying to unravel it the night before, I found that I did not believe that the lady on the steps had spoken to him. I believed that self-suggestioned, he had imagined that she had. Other people have had auditory hallucinations, and why not he? Why not he, particularly? He was just in a condition for them. In any event one thing now was certain and, in a matter such as this,

one was a great many. The lady of the steps was not Aly Bolton. Definitely she was eliminated. I was free to pick and choose between a dead girl and a *dame inconnue* and of the two I infinitely preferred the latter. At the same time, it struck me that in a town as beautiful as Manhattan the coincidence of three young women identical in beauty was fabulous. Of the three one had now dropped out. The wonder remained. The subtraction diminished it by not more than a jot.

I looked at Bradish. "What did Cally say?"

"About what?"

"The condition of affairs in Peru."

He scowled. "You are always trying to be funny."

I laughed. "How splendid it is for you not even to have to try! Come now, out with it. What did he say?"

"He did not say anything. He had no chance. I did not tell him. If I had, he would have wanted to have me committed."

As he said that, he nodded at me and I nodded back.

"I am not so sure but that we both of us ought to be. Here we have been, two days running, hunting a ghost at high noon and in this beastly Park of all places. Not Cally alone, but anyone else would think we were cracked."

"Speak for yourself. What Cally did say is that I ought to get out of here."

I ran up the flag. "Granada, Sevilla, Cadiz! Can't you hear the castagnettes, the clinking heels, the guitars and the shouts? Can't you smell the orange-trees and the blood? Can't you see the flash of the rapier, the bull on his knees and the whole plaza yell-

ing like mad? The Lord have mercy upon us! There people spend their coppers and live. Here they grub for them and die."

He turned on me. "All that is copy. You know you don't care a rap for any of it and you know, too, and jolly well, that I don't either."

We had reached the avenue. Just beyond, a man was scaling a bus. I did not know him, but he reminded me of Austen. I thought of the street of obscure calamities in which he had buttonholed me. As I remembered it, it was somewhere off there to the east and I asked Bradish if he knew where he lived.

Bradish gestured vaguely. "He left a card for me. Very civil of him, I thought."

We lunched like imitation barons in the pseudo-baronial hall. But Bradish played with the food. He had a headache, he said, and I never heard him say such a thing before.

Afterward, in the library, I caught him gazing at me with pensive malignancy.

"What did you have in your head yesterday when you brought up that Bonheur business?"

At the moment I had forgotten just what had suggested it and I told him so.

"I will refresh your memory then. You intimated that Nelly might have misconstrued it. What the devil did you mean?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

I was wriggling. He saw it and pinned me down.

"I wish you would tell me."

A good straight honest lie has saved many a situation. But, at the moment, my imagination was indi-

gent. I could not think of one and though I regretted it later, I told the truth.

"Well, then, since you will have it, you were a bit precipitate."

"How?"

"I lied like a thief to Bonheur. I told him I had seen him in the dock, told him I had seen you sign that cheque. Then I shook the stripes and handcuffs at him. When I got through, he was a wet rag."

Bradish bit his lip, but clutching back at his own version, he brought it out.

"Peters said he would not budge."

"Peters was only in there for a moment. He marched in and threatened to knock Bonheur's head off. I sent him out again. Afterward I rather feared he might have got it wrong and I sat about forever expecting you would telephone. You didn't, but then——"

"But then what?"

"Afterward I thought it all bunkum."

He roared it. "Bunkum! What do you mean?"

I looked him over. "See here, I have no desire to defame any woman, least of all your mother-in-law. But I'll wager what you like that she gave Bonheur that cheque—which she knew you would honour—just to pave the way for her to come here and throw a scare in you. That day Austen buttonholed me. I told you about it. He said she would jockey her daughter into marrying you. Well, she did. She jockeyed her, jockeyed you and that's the long and short of it."

He passed his hand over his forehead, got up, limped into the chamber of horrors and back again, while I threshed around for a palliative. I did not find any,

or what I did find seemed very futile. Yet what is there in life that is not futile? As for this thing, I knew that by day he could rid himself of it. Through mere determination, one can, by day, rid the mind of anything. But, at night, I knew it would take him unawares, pull at his sleeve, wake him, sit there and stare.

"She has got to know. She has got to be told that I knew nothing of it."

He had stopped limping about and was standing in front of me, the spider pulsating as I had never seen it pulsate before. In standing he sort of shook, as one does with the ague.

"I don't know how I can get her to know. In the Park, if I see her again, she may refuse to listen. I——"

He broke off, sat down and got up again. "I'll import a lama, hang me if I don't."

I could not make head or tail of it. Perhaps he saw that I could not for he waved and added:

"You told me of a Thibetan lama that raised the dead."

"Lord of Eternity!" I helplessly exclaimed. "No doubt I did. I am capable of retailing any insanity. But a lama is not a prize-pig. You couldn't import one. Besides——"

"You said," he cut in, "that there had been any number of instances. Other means failing, there shall be one here."

I sat back. It seemed phantasmagoric. But what else had the episode on the steps been? Perhaps where all is abnormal, the abnormal ceases. Yet the abnormal need not be the illicit and I said as much.

"That way leads to Bedlam."

He laughed. His laughter was that which a poet catalogued as heard in hell, far down.

"Where else have I been since I woke up at the manor and saw that woman looking at me? As soon as I knew about Nelly, I wished I had gone with her. I have wished it a hundred times. I wish it now."

He sat down. "I suppose it is indecent of me to say so. It is always indecent to say how one feels. But, unless I find a way out of this——"

"Well, you will," I interrupted. "I have told you that. You are standing before a door that is closed, bolted, barred, sealed and walled. There are just two things than can efface it—time and silence."

Sotto voce I added: "And some one to beguile them both."

Angrily he protested. "Save that for your novels. Ten years hence, time and silence might help and would help now, I suppose, if all this had happened ten years ago. But today, tomorrow, the day after! Not for an instant."

"See here, if you don't mind, I'll ask some of your people to fetch me a drink."

I did not want it. To fuddle in the daytime has always seemed to me the act of a barbarian or else of a fool. But liquor, which excites most men, was a sedative to Bradish and I thought that under its influence, his mood might change, veer and pass.

He was one too many for me.

"Stop on here and get as squiffy as you like. My head aches to split. I am off to bed."

He was going, but he stopped, turned, pointed.

"That door you know—the door bolted, barred, sealed, walled—I'll break it down."

XVII

IT seemed very unnatural of Bradish to have a headache. Unnatural too was his irritability. In my ignorance, the combination seemed to me symptomatic of approaching derangement and so weighed on me that that night I awoke calling for help. I had had a frightful dream about Switzerland.

It passed as such things do pass and that afternoon I went to the address which Aly Bolton had supplied.

By comparison with the walkup, the house was noble. A lift exalted me and presently a moonfaced maid conducted me to a sitting-room that was charming.

"Rather a change from Harlem," I said when the maid's mistress appeared.

She had come into a little money, she told me. In telling it, she gave me her hand and, indicating an oblong silver box that sat on a table, offered me a cigarette. But though she smiled, as I think she alone could smile, she had the languid air of those who are a bit overworked.

"And now tell me about yourself," she added.

I was admiring her frock. It was delicious and she was delicious in it. The combined delights sang about me.

"You may perhaps remember my ghost story."

"You have been writing it?"

"I have been living it. In the second chapter you walked in."

She was looking at me, reading me, I thought, but even for her clear eyes I felt that that second chapter was too involved and I shook it out for her after summarising the first.

In turn she summed it. "The lady of the steps you took first for Nelly Chilton, then for me, then for a stranger, after which she vanished, though not until she had told poor Mr. Bradish that his Nelly was dead. But what better ghost story would you have?"

"Personally I cannot improve it. But you might. Since yesterday I have been hoping you would. The curious gift that is yours may save a poor devil's reason."

Always superior, she did not deny the gift nor did she belittle it. She put it properly before me.

"One may psychometrise an object, not an illusion."

"Forgive me, this was nothing of the kind."

"A lady capable of a triple metamorphosis while descending a flight of steps may not be a ghost, but certainly she is a moving picture and would you not call that an illusion?"

"I will call it whatever you like. But I do not believe she spoke to Bradish. I believe that what he said she said was an auditory hallucination. Now, ignorant brute that I am, I do not know whether I have an open mind or not. But I can admit that if he had an auditory hallucination, I may have had an ocular one. That lady may be a figment of my own imagination. She certainly is as far as you are concerned. Yet, assuming that Bradish heard nothing and that I saw less, our testimony coincides in one particular. The vision appeared to us both. There is no illusion about that."

Her head drawn back, she was gazing upward, not at the ceiling, but through it and beyond. At what? I cannot say. At other stars perhaps, at skies more

deeply blue, at lands that would be divine were it not for man.

A picture returned and I displayed it.

"'I saw the sphinx in flight. He galloped like a jackal!'"

Leisurely she redescended to earth and to me.

"You have a solution?"

"No, but I had an impact. It directed me to the Park. Yesterday I saw you there. Then I knew why I was sent. I was sent to meet you, for you alone can help us."

"Tell me how."

"I will tell you more. Bradish believes that the vision has misinterpreted an entirely innocent act of his. That is impossible. Death took her too suddenly. It is true she might have acquired an erroneous account of it where she is and that, I think, is his idea. Yet how could she? One does not gossip in the astral. At least it is not supposable. But he won't look at it in that way. In the sheer luxury of his grief he wants to get at her."

"Orpheus and Eurydice!"

"A modern version. Orpheus, whose lyre charmed all nature, all hell as well, tried with it to recover his dear departed. Bradish thinks a cheque book equally coercive. I was idiot enough to tell him of a Thibetan lama who had evoked a dead emperor. Yesterday he spoke of importing one quite as though he had only to cable and hang the expense."

"Your poor Mr. Bradish might know that every lama is not a magician and also that magic is not confined to Thibet."

I took another cigarette. "There are satanists

everywhere. I dare say there are a few here."

She moved a matchbox to me. "I know of one by repute. Probably there are others. The atmosphere of New York, charged as it is with grossness, is highly favourable for them. Yet I doubt that any or all of them could help your friend in the least. I doubt that a congress of black magicians could summon Nelly Chilton."

"She is too white, you mean?"

"That would have its effect. But there is another reason, one of a different order. I——"

She hesitated, paused, broke it off.

I picked it up. "Well?"

She pushed it away. "It is all so out of the common that sooner or later I shall be reading it, with your name on the cover. You have been living it, as you said. You know all the characters, all the facts."

"Not all the facts, there's the rub. Even otherwise, it entirely exceeds my absence of talent. For that matter I can think of but one writer who could do it justice and that is Bil Sayers. Have you read *The Dawn*?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"Enormously. The book is very able. So is he. He keeps his name out of the papers and nowadays it takes genius to do that."

For a moment she appeared to turn it over. Then she said: "It may be he feels that a writer should so arrange his life that posterity can find no evidence of his having lived at all."

I laughed. "There are writers that survive only because death has ignored them. But all this is shop-talk. What did Canada say?"

"Where I was it did not talk, it whispered. I went for that whisper. At times, New York deafens me, then it suffocates and I have to get away."

"While you were away, I took the liberty of enquiring for you at Delatour's. At the time I did not know but that you might be the lady of the steps."

"They undeceived you, I hope."

"A shiny young man was reasonably vague. I left with the impression that somewhere in Canada there was a young gentlewoman with two names and no address."

"The shiny young man knew me only as an expert. My individuality and my own name I keep for my friends."

"And among your friends is a sorcerer. Would you care to visit his cavern tonight?"

"Dear Mr. Delmonico? I should love to."

I stood up. "You're a brick. I will stop by for you then at, say——"

She helped me. "At seven-thirty."

Presently the lift was redescending me to earth.

XVIII

THAT night, when the philters had been removed, the den of the necromancer was void of the bewitched. The disenthralled were afar, at the sea, in the mountains. Those still under the spell had gone to roof-gardens, or else to joys less severe. In a corner two phantoms were tenderly telling how they hated each other. Occasionally a goblin moved as moves a form in a dream. At the entrance occasionally a face appeared and vanished. Otherwise we were alone.

Among the elixirs had been a flagon of Nuits. There is nothing so agreeably demoralising. A faint reflection of its scarlet midnight had passed into her face. On the table her right hand lay. In her left hand was a cigarette. Though years have gone since then, I can see her still, see the smoke as she blew it through her teeth, see the dawn with which the Nuits had tinted her face. From the back of her chair her wrap trailed. The colour, pale amber, rhymed with her dress which was mauve and which left her slimly and decently naked, not severely nude as one of the post-bellum frocks that began too late and ended too soon would have done, but after the engaging manner of what was fashion then, just calmly and properly bare. In that dress she looked like a song from Shelley translated by Baudelaire. The aërial effect was there; there too was the odour of exotics and these influences were more subtly incandescent than the headiness which Nelly Chilton in her more definite beauty had exhaled. Of that beauty one had been at once aware. It was fragrant. The beauty of this girl disclosed itself slowly as perfection ever does. It needed custom and a certain degree of intimacy before the full loveliness appeared. An acquired taste perhaps, yet a taste which once acquired none other can replace.

Ouvrons nos cœurs aux ivresses nouvelles.

In that line of Leconte de Lisle there is an invitation and a wisdom which most of us miss. Lifting the thimble of another elixir I was about to repeat it to her when she took it from me. With that curious divinatory gift which she possessed she may have seen

it coming and, conscious that it awoke no echo, she waved it away. The heights are not for every mortal. They were not to be mine that night.

"We are here on business," she was saying and looking as she said it as unbusinesslike as you please. "If I am to help, there are one or two things I should know. Whom had she that was near to her?"

"Well," I said, "she had at least one distant relative. That was her mother. Mrs. Chilton had a Darling for her always. I think though it came from the lips. At heart I think she looked on the girl as a golden egg, or do I mean the hen that lays it?"

"And her father, was he a distant relative also?"

"A foreign one I should say. At some time or other he folded his tent. He may be now in Paris or he may be in San Francisco. When a New Yorker concludes to disappear he makes for the coast, or else for the Seine. What determines the choice must depend on memory, or such information as a club window supplies."

"A man of position was he?"

"I do not know. I do not know what a man of position is. But I fancy he was reasonably aware that he came of good stock. If he had come of better stock he might have omitted to be aware of it at all."

She raised a slender finger. "If I am to help you to help Mr. Bradish, please do not talk like a society play."

I raised my hand in salute.

The slender finger sank.

"The golden egg you mention spells Mr. Bradish, I suppose. From the spelling am I to infer the wolf?"

"The whole pack. They chased Mrs. Chilton

through the doors of Bradish's bank where she dodged in and out and ran into a fine fellow who promised her the penitentiary unless she permitted him to make up to her daughter. Or so at least she confided to Bradish."

"You mean she invented it?"

"At any rate, Bradish swallowed it. And here the plot thickens. Previously and, I fancy, by prearrangement, the fine fellow had shown Bradish a forged cheque which naturally he disowned and, as it happened, in the presence of witnesses. At the moment, the poor chap never for an instant imagined that Jim the Penman was Mrs. Chilton. An hour later she swam in, owned up and, the next day, with an imaginary penitentiary staring her in the face, frightened her daughter into taking him. For a moment only. Since then Bradish has learned the truth. He thinks she has also and thinks she believes he knew of it at the time and got her under false pretences."

Aly Bolton, dropping her cigarette in a fingerbowl, watched it drown and looked up at me.

"There was a nearer one yet?"

"Much nearer. A chap named Austen. She was dead in love with him and is still for that matter. Dead in love is a ridiculous expression when applied to the living, but it fits a ghost."

Up again went that slender finger. "I asked you not to talk like a society play and now you are trying to talk like a low comedian."

"I wish I might so talk that——"

She had taken her gloves. She was reaching back for the wrap. I saw that the nature of my conversational ambitions she divined and dismissed.

Summoning a goblin, I paid and off we went and into a cab where I did not attempt to take her hand. I knew it would be withdrawn. I knew she was not the girl to give a man the lesser mystery of a hand to hold unless the greater mysteries were to follow.

I knew she would never graduate the degrees to the temple. I knew she might never give anything, but I knew also that if she ever did, the gift, however slight, would be the token of everything else. I not only knew that, I knew that she knew exactly what I was thinking.

The experience of making up to her without the necessity of saying a word, delighted me. It supplied all the enticements of love without any of its disillusionings.

But at once I was conscious that even the immaterial was denied me. We were seated together, a fold of her wrap just touching me, and it was through the fold that she may have got the current of my thoughts that were perfumed with her imagined kisses. In any event, without moving an inch, she drew the fold from me. The motion she made was so slight that had I been less conscious of her I would not have noticed it. But I did notice it. I knew it was a rebuke, one as unspoken as everything else had been, and turning to her I raised my hat.

"Forgive me."

Readily she might have asked for what? Readily she might have pretended ignorance. There was no pretence about Aly Bolton.

"Yes," she said. "I will." She paused and added:

"We have to see Mr. Bradish through and for that we must be friends."

Friends! Dear me, how long ago that is!

XIX

THE next day it rained ravishingly, a rich downpour that ordinarily would have been to me life's full delight. A nice long rainy day, what more can the heart desire? It keeps you in and keeps others out. But my table was bare. Bare was the cupboard of my mind. I had squandered my substance on ghosts and girls. In revenge, that drab of a muse had fled. She had deserted my bed and board. Mentally, that day, I was dished.

To the ripple of the rain I beat a tattoo on the window. Hollow device. Wearying of it and conscious of being in low spirits, the genial idea occurred to me of cheering Bradish up.

The fates had ordered otherwise. When drippingly I got to his house, Mr. Bradish was not at home, sir. Would I wait? No, I would not, and I descended on the Buck Club where that gay ass Brevoort supplied me with arid jests and offers of liquid refreshment.

"See here," in my misery I said to him. "What's up?"

"Not stocks. They have been up. Now they are down. Thank the Lord they can't go sideways. Another Martini?"

The day, though dark, was young. There were but two other members in the room and they were at the farther window. I knew that intentionally they would not listen and that even otherwise they were too removed to overhear. Mentally I weighed it. Should I tell him? Weighing it still, I beat about the bush.

"The last time I saw you, a very affable person con-

verted your handkerchief into a conservatory. Remember it?"

"Shook it out, the beggar did, over Miss Chilton. Should say I do remember."

At his empty glass he nodded. "Tell you what. When I read about her, it knocked me silly."

Cautiously he looked at the other window. "I say! You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

"No, I don't," I told him. "But I am dreadfully afraid of them."

Yet as I uttered that antique stupidity, I gasped.

The gay ass now was solemn. "Six days ago, no, hold on, five, it was on the eighteenth, I know because I had an appointment with my dentist. I was on my way to him when I ran smack into her. You don't believe me, of course not. Would not believe my own mother if she told me. Couldn't believe it myself. Yet there was Nelly Chilton and I off with my hat. Never noticed me. Passed straight on. I tell you a feather would have done for me. What bucked me, the Lord only knows, but I doubled and followed her. Followed her straight into a shop and found it was she and yet that it wasn't."

I snarled at him. "What do you mean?"

"Search me. Looked exactly like herself and yet she didn't."

I snarled again. "That second Martini that you haven't had, has not gone to your head, has it?"

"I don't wonder you ask. But I tell you there was something damn queer about it."

"You know she is dead, don't you?"

"Of course I know it. If the notice in the paper had not said, 'Funeral private,' I'd have gone. Sent

flowers though. Knew her when she was knee-high."

He touched a bell and ordered. "Two Martinis."

I rounded on him. "In the shop, how did she look?"

"Ghastly."

"Shop lighted?"

"They all are."

"Calcium?"

"Don't remember. Why?"

"That might account for it. Besides——"

"Besides what?"

"If you knew her since she was a child, you must have known her people. Had she any cousins?"

"Her father is the last of the Chiltons."

"Is her mother equally unique?"

"Her mother was a Fellowes and, by George! now I come to think of it——"

"Well, what?"

"She had a brother, Cranston Fellowes. He's dead. Got drunk on a yacht and fell overboard. They fished him out. Too much for him though. Pneumonia probably. That was before my time. Heard of it often though. My governor knew him. Said he and Mrs. Chilton were the living image of each other. Now he had a daughter. Never saw her. Don't know anybody that ever did. When she was fourteen she bolted with a chauffeur."

"A chauffeur!" I exclaimed.

Gaily the gay ass laughed: "Hey, why not? Everybody can't be a best-seller."

The cocktails had come. While he was drinking his, it naturally occurred to me that the lady of the steps and the lady in the shop must be the same and, conceivably, the chauffeur's inamorata.

THE GHOST GIRL

I raised my glass. "What did she do in the shop?"

"That's it! A floorwalker asked what I wanted. I looked at him as much as to say, 'speak when you're spoken to,' just looked from her at him and back again and, begad, she'd gone!"

The coincidence was so striking that untasted I put the cocktail down and tentatively played out a rope.

"The usual sea of millinery had engulfed her."

"Devilish high the sea must have been to carry her off like that."

Still playing out the rope, I laughed. "Not a bit of it. The trouble with you is you are too fascinating. A woman has eyes in the back of her head. This woman knew you were following her. She feared for herself and entered a shop to lose you."

If you can chuckle gravely, the gay ass did. Yet at once, assuming a false modesty, he waved the picture away.

"Oh, for all of me——"

Again I rounded on him. "Look here! You go about telling other people what you have told me and before you can say Jack Robinson they'll clap you in Bloomingdale. Isn't it obvious that the lady in the shop is your chauffeur's girl?"

"He isn't my chauffeur. What's more, I fancy she is no longer his. But perhaps you are right. It may have been she. I didn't think of it before."

"Think of it now then."

We were seated as, in a club, men often are, at a window. Through it, for a little since, I had been aware of an encroaching blue. The ravishing rain had ceased. Westward the sky had cleared. At the houses

opposite, the sun, from its magic treasury, was tossing aigrettes of gold.

But now a youth in a slashed waistcoat was bearing down on us.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Brevoort. A telephone call, sir."

With a gesture of excuse, he left me. I was glad of it. The advice I had volunteered applied to us both. I too needed to think of it and while he was shut in a cupboard, I ferreted about, found my umbrella and went out.

To go out when you have nowhere to go affords a spaciousness of freedom that is eminently relaxing. I had no wish to curtail it. After the stuffiness of that window, the puddles and gasolined air exhilarated and though it would be an excess of metaphor to say that they enlightened, none the less at the next corner I threw the chauffeur's girl into the middle of the street. Good enough for that gay ass if he wanted her, she was too fanciful for me. For a moment I had been inclined to swallow her, but on that corner I threw her up. The facial resemblance of cousins is rarely vivid and I abandoned the young woman with a shrug.

I was yet to learn that one does not get rid of a girl like that. It was some time before she caught up with me again but when I next saw her, then, in return for my shrug, she gave me a start.

It was near the Cathedral that I said goodbye to the misconducted daughter of Cranston Fellowes who, in addition to outraging the proprieties with a chauffeur, had managed to become mistaken for a ghost, and although I dropped her there, originally, in the club window where I first saw her, I had thought of taking

her along and making her go through her tricks for the benefit of Bradish and his peace of mind.

Yet, as I afterward realised, nothing earthly could have benefited him. Back of the doors that close behind our birth it must have been all prearranged. Long ago, on inaccessible spheres, for some sin anterior and forgotten, all that had happened to him and all that was yet to happen, must have been written in his progression. Men who denounce the injustice of fate do not realise that their destiny is self-made, that as they sow they reap, though the reaping be postponed until their nominal death has intervened and they return here for the harvest.

These esotericisms did not occur to me when I was throwing the chauffeur's girl in the street. They came, with other things in their train, years later. At the time, innocently, in my ignorance, I thought that one may outwit fate. Innocently and ignorantly I thought I might help Bradish. I know I tried and, in his horrible journey to nowhere and back, it is possible that my efforts were of aid. But the journey itself, the long road hedged with hazards, no one but he could take, no one could save him from it. In the secret chambers of his soul he followed it. He had to follow it. Ineluctable as such journeys ever are, that journey was his destiny self-made. But I can say for him, that though he fell, as again and again he did fall, he saw it through and, not at the end, there was no end, there never is an end, but somewhere, midway between nothing and nowhere on that hazard-strewn road, he found peace. How he found it, and where he found it, will be related later on. Yet, now that I think of it, Swinburne told it better than I can, better than

anyone could. "Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea."

XX

"I DON'T like it, sir," Peters was telling me.

It was in my workshop. I am not the Pope and I had asked him to sit down. I do not think he liked that either. In any event, an expert in his vocation, he knew the niceties of its etiquette too well to accept. Civilly, but firmly, he had refused.

"Well, Peters," I told him, "you know I cannot listen to you. What Mr. Bradish does is his own affair. If he cares to tell me that is another kettle of fish, but you ought not to."

"Then who can I tell, sir?"

That was it. Bradish had relatives whom he studiously avoided. There was no one to stand in loco parentis. To produce another legal phrase, I was his nearest friend.

For a moment I turned it over. An idea crossed it and I said:

"Anyway, say nothing to Dr. Cally."

"No, sir, I certainly will not, sir. But that now is another thing that has made me h anxious. I asked Mr. Bradish if he would wish me to have Dr. Cally in. Mr. Bradish has always been most the gentleman to us servants. But he cursed me something dreadful. He looked frightful, sir. I was afraid he'd have a fit. But if I may take the liberty of saying it, the people that come there—" and Peters raised a hand in mortification—"they——"

I interrupted him. "I can't listen to that. I will

stop by and if Mr. Bradish cares to tell me anything I may know what to say. In that box over there you will find some cigars. Help yourself."

A week had gone since I threw the chauffeur's girl overboard. In the interim, my old drab of a muse had returned more in love with me than before. Poor taste on her part, but there she was and I had been wringing from her a tale of the west. As, at the time, I had not been farther west than Hoboken, local colour stood about in jars. I had only to help myself. Within range of my gun—which I could pull by a slight of wrist too quick for the eye to detect—were prairies, cattle, saloons, faro-banks, cowboys, bad men, bad lands and The Girl, a flower, fleet as a mustang and pure as prayer.

I had gone at the accursed thing because I could not go at the ghost story and I could not go at that because I was living it. You never can properly begin a novel until it is finished.

All that by the way. I enter it in these papers only that I may make it clear, how it was that since the ravishing day when I pitched Miss Fellowes in the mud, I had not seen Bradish, or Aly Bolton either. For that matter, I had not even revisited the Park. But, at the time, I felt that the lady of the steps would descend them no more. It seemed to me that when Bradish first saw her there, she had not seen him. It seemed to me also that when she did see him, she may have feared that if she went there again, some effort might be made to detain her. I have, it is true, no facts to support my opinion, but I believe that the second time she was seen on those steps was the last time she returned there. In any event, neither Brad-

ish nor I saw her there again, nor have I heard of anyone more fortunate.

But to go back a bit. I was in the workshop wringing a farrage of rot from that drab, taking down her gurgles, when I heard someone without. There was no pounding; just a tap, just a voice.

"Please, sir. It's Peters."

It was an awkward and perilous moment. But something might be wrong with Bradish. Consequently I had no recourse but to go forward with a backward eye and, while clutching the story with one hand, open the door with the other.

Four minutes later, Peters had gone. With him that fly-by-night had flown. Try as I might, it was idle, not a line would come. The only thing that prevented me from throwing my inkstand out of the window was the subliminal consciousness that I would have to buy another.

In the circumstances, what I did do was perhaps excessive. Resigning myself to the will of the gods, I went to sleep.

I awoke with a jump. Either the house had blown up or else the roof had fallen in. But no, it was merely Bradish at the door.

Without any of the amenities of life, he issued his edict. I was to come to his house at once. The pronunciamento pronounced, he deigned to be scurrilous.

"What on earth have you been doing?"

"Writing a book."

"Why haven't you looked in on me?"

"Writing a book is like having a baby. Any interruption is at the expense of the child."

"You talk like a wetnurse and act like a thug. I

would have telephoned, wired or sent, but no one can get at you. Here I am, on the edge of it, and I have had to come myself. What is more, a blear-eyed scoundrel below told me you had married and moved to Brooklyn. What a devil of a way to live!"

We were on the stair while he was singing that song and presently we were in his car.

There he improvised another. "That door is not as tight as you think. I have got the locksmith."

As he said that, I could see Peters, his hand lifted in mortification at the people Bradish received.

"Where did you find him?" I asked. "In the gutter?"

"It was a bookshop."

"A bookshop!" I amazedly repeated.

"A cellar. Run by a lousy old party who sells queer trash. Sells it, no, has it on tap and sits there looking at it, twirling his thumbs, waiting for customers that never come. He had the effrontery to tell me he was busy, yes and fearless."

"How did you——"

"How did I find him? Through another bookseller. When I got in the cellar I asked for occult literature and an instructor. It was then he told me he was busy. I paid him for his time, promised him more money and gave him my address. He has been sending instructors ever since. Of the lot, I selected one. He is the locksmith. He says he can make the door open of itself. If he does, I believe I shall die of joy after having nearly died of grief."

We were flying through the Park. I was looking at the stars, at the myriad worlds, and a very convincing spectacle they are when you have erroneous ideas of

your own importance. In the light of suns that reach us æons after the suns themselves have ceased to be, it occurred to me that Bradish had an idea, perhaps exaggerated, of the importance of mundane joys and sorrows. What he had said about the door opening of itself seemed to me equally exaggerated. I do not believe in miracles, although in view of my literary crimes it must have required a procession of them to keep me out of Sing Sing.

The flight of the car diminished into a soapy slide. We were at the house where, as usual, Peters was in the hall. His face, as wooden as ever, was an expressionless mask from which his eyes looked at me. There was no recognition in them, but there was, I thought, anxiety.

Bradish, meanwhile, had said a word to him.

"When the magus comes we will be in the library."

The magus! I chewed the title. The taste was rotten.

But in the library where already Gedney had preceded us, there were, in addition to authors less interesting, a set of the works of the monks of Chartreuse, operas from Cognac, and a sonata, pale yellow, that had been composed in Rotterdam.

Bradish began reading one of them and, I thought, very fluently.

Patting his mouth with his handkerchief, he sat down at the table where already I had seated myself and to which he drew another chair.

"For the magus," he told me.

I smiled. "Have you found him expensive?"

"Well," he replied, drinking quite as fluently again, "no." He waved the glass, indicating the room, the

spaciousness of the great, white, staring house. "In view of this, I suppose he put prices up a peg or two. But that is neither here nor there. At any figure the key will be cheap. By the way, I wish you would ask for a look at it. I know nothing of these things and you do."

I sat back. "Good heavens! What I know could find a playground on the head of a pin. A few odds and ends I may have picked up, but that is all that can be picked up by anyone not an initiate and the initiate tell nothing. Or, if they do, they are killed."

Bradish put down the glass. "How killed? What do you mean?"

"In France a man named Delormel, who was an initiate, published a book—*La Période Solaire*. What was in it I do not know, but I do know that in twenty-four hours not one single copy of that book was anywhere obtainable and Delormel was dead."

"The magus!"

It was Gedney announcing the locksmith who, at the entrance, folded his arms and bowed.

Affectations have never appealed to me and that affectation of orientalism angered. To give him such credit as may have been his due, he saw my hostility at once, and saw it, too, though my expression had not altered.

But such credit as may have been his due, he must have been unable to obtain elsewhere. Thin, and by comparison with Bradish and myself, undersized, he wore a long frock coat, stained and shabby. On one hand he had a glove from which a finger had prominently gone. He had a high frayed collar, a dingy black stock, but no cuffs, none at least that I could

see, and I divined the complete absence of linen. The man was in rags and he held himself with an air that Frederick Le Maître may have displayed, when, in *Robert Macaire*, he appeared princely in tatters.

He bowed again, moved toward us and sat down. His eyes large, black, piercing, commanding, turned from Bradish to me. His hair, yellowish white, the colour of old straw, was abundant and through it he ran that fingerless glove. His features, plainly Semitic, were otherwise regular and his skin, pale saffron, was blotched. He might have been forty. He may have been a hundred.

As silent he sat, turning his eyes without moving his head, I thought him the most repellent creature I had ever beheld, a soul unclean, which is common enough; but a soul so unclean that it attracted elementals as filth draws flies. Things revolting, unmaterialised and therefore invisible, but none the less hideous, might, I thought, be crawling all over him and, conceivably, might crawl from him to me. Mentally I crossed myself. Physically I edged away.

He saw that as, presumably, he saw everything and smiled. But what a smile! A smile that disclosed teeth that were vulperine, black and yellow, pointed and sharp, the fangs of a human hyena.

Then at once, but slowly, in the voice of a ventriloquist, each syllable carefully enunciated, he addressed me.

"You are young, therefore ignorant and in ignorance is disdain. You are contemptuous and unaware that I am a priest. Magus means priest and the knowledge you lack and which I possess is the sacred wisdom to which Plato, Plutarch and Virgil bowed and which

caused three of its hierophants to lay symbolic homages at the cradle of your Lord. That wisdom, the Maghdim, created the gigantic civilisations whose ruins still support the weight of sixty cycles. In your ignorance you disdain the Maghdim which, in your mouth, is magic and magic a conjurer's device. Sir, magic is will. It was by the magic of his own will that Brahma created whatever is. By will man may also create, he may acquire prerogatives apparently superhuman and, if he be an adept, even as I, he can will to his will all the forces and powers of nature."

I nodded at him. "You are entirely right. I am an ignorant brute. Ignorant and cynical. But I have heard that magic is of two classes, the white and the black; that the one works through pantacles and prayer, the other by sacrilege and Satanism. Yours, I assume is the latter. Jim, pass the bottle. Give the magus a drink."

"I do not consume liquor, sir, and if I may further instruct you, Satan is the name that the perversely ignorant give to Elim Sabaot."

"Who is that?" Bradish asked.

"Elim Sabaot is the Being whom you call God."

"Ah, yes!" I exclaimed. Illiterately I added: "Elim Sabaot is the incommunicable name of which the mention was forbidden and which is employed now only in magical mantras by vulgar thaumaturges. Do you count yourself among them, Magus?"

"Sir, I am a priest of the Maghdim, and if that be vulgar and black, then black and vulgar was the power with which Swedenborg summoned the dead. Black and vulgar also was the power which Spiridon, a bishop whom the Church made a saint, evoked the spirit of his

daughter. Spiridon and Swedenborg were priests of the Maghdim, even as I."

"Good Lord!" I disgustedly exclaimed. "If it comes to that, then so was Cagliostro."

"Permit me again to correct you, sir. Cagliostro, though he summoned the dead and had them parade before his guests at supper, possessed but an imperfect knowledge of the sacred science and was surrendered by the true magi to the Roman Inquisition."

Physically the creature was revolting. Morally he nauseated me. I felt I could stand it no longer and I started to go, but beforehand I gave him one more.

"It is wonderful to meet anyone as invariably right as you are. At the same time, the honour of being addressed by Cagliostro's superior is too overwhelming. Jim, I'll borrow your car and go home."

The beast had risen. He turned to Bradish.

"Since your friend intends to counsel you against my offices: nay, by his manner has so counselled you already, it is for me to go."

He backed to the entrance. There, folding his arms, he bowed as he had bowed before.

Bradish followed him out. For a moment I could hear them talking, their voices diminishing as they went, the key jingling in the wake. I was sorry then I had not asked to look at it and then flung it in the vermin's face.

For assuming the key, assuming also that it had even a minor value, it would have opened one door at least, the door of some box in which there was coin. Yet, I suddenly had to ask myself, was it not already in the lock of the cheque-book that Bradish signed? The

fact that Bradish was a fool and this creature a knave did not lessen the magic of that.

But there was another angle, far more important. Any key of a door to the dead drips with perils. I feared them for Bradish who, at the moment, came limping in.

Malignantly he surveyed me. "Rather had you, eh? Served you right for being so damned uncivil. Never saw you show up worse, damned if I have, and I wanted you to sit in with us. Now he won't have you."

But that cup of coffee was a trifle too strong. In no circumstances would I have approached the door and there it went slamming in my face. The ease with which the trick had been turned made me laugh.

"What the devil are you grinning at? Do you think he can't do it?"

"Do what?"

"Break through."

Before answering, I helped myself to the Rotterdam sonata. Then I looked up at him.

"Given the Satanism, the occult knowledge, together with the ability to employ it and, everything being possible, perhaps he can. But the perils of the threshold——"

"Damn the perils!"

"Yes, but then they may damn you. In the last attempt at anything of the kind that I know of, one of the participants was strangled to death and another went raving mad."

"What became of the third?"

Surprised at the question, I asked one. "How do you know there was a third?"

"The old cock said there must be three and, hang it, I had counted on you."

"You will have to count again then. In this instance there were three. The third escaped in time."

Bradish gestured. "Escaped, did he, and from what? The effects of his own imagination. Otherwise they must have botched it. From what I understand, and I propose to verify it, in the course of the ceremonies the door will open and Nelly will appear."

"Perhaps," I told him and I told him, too, to mark the perhaps. "But," I added, "supposing that instead of the dead, there appear, as there appeared to the people I just mentioned, a materialised elemental that grapples with you, eats your throat out, tears your reason away. What happened to them, might happen to you. They also were trying to evoke a dead girl. A demoniac incube came in her place. For God's sake, Jim——"

He shoved the gin at me. "Have another. We are not in Sunday school."

I was looking at him and, as I looked, I had an impression, curious, abnormal and perhaps unfounded that he was obsessed. In his eyes was an expression so evil and about his mouth a twist so vile, that it was as though a psychical confiscation had occurred and I was looking at another being.

Since then I have been through the war, where I learned what fear is; where I learned also that in the presence of the fearful you will falter if you do not laugh. I had not learned that lesson then. None the less I laughed. I laughed at him—or at it.

Viciously he eyed me. Then at once, with a shake of the head, he raised a hand and passed it down over

the face from forehead to chin. It was as though he were wiping, or trying to wipe, some of the evil away. But the action may have been entirely unconscious. None the less and though the horrible expression remained, it had diminished and in a moment, when he again spoke, it seemed to leave him, sponged away by an effort of his own volition.

"The old cock told me to say to you from him, Silence and Farewell."

I looked at my glass and from it at him. "Very considerate. It is the occultist leave-taking. I do wish he would say it to you."

As I said that, I could have sworn that in spite of his efforts, that revolting look, the look of another entity, glared out from him at me.

He turned on his heel and turned back.

"The car is waiting."

So too was that look. I did not laugh then. I went on and out. As I went the look followed. In the car, there it was. It was like a look shot through the keyhole of some door below.

XXI

IN times of stress, and this was one of them, a cultivated indifference has its value, but it is perhaps less conducive to serenity than the opiates of work. Resolutely, on the morrow, I prepared to give my pen a skirt dance around that garbage flower of the west, yet, such was the stress, that it was not until evening that I had it sufficiently groomed for the grand écart. But what pen, however poor, can be saltitudinous on an empty stomach? With a view to various vilenesses

at a cookshop nearby, but accompanied by cowpunchers, bad men and that prairie pearl, I was somnambulistically vacating the rookery when the janitor's drooping eye popped up and a note fluttered at me.

Anything of the kind was distinctly forbidden and I was about to give him fits but inadvertently I had looked at the superscription. Never before had I seen that writing. Yet its character, oddly cobwebby and equally clear, was as serviceable as a photograph.

"I thought as how," the dirty little man was saying, "seeing it was her——"

"And thou hast done well, my pretty maiden. Here."

I fed a dollar into his dirty paw and read.

Would I come and dine?

Would I? The bad men could shoot themselves through, shoot every cowpuncher I never saw. For all I cared the freckled lily could bolt for good, bolt for bad. A fairer flower was beckoning then.

"Will come with joy and leave with regret," I scribbled with her address on a card.

"And here," I said, feeding out another dollar. "Run around to the telegraph shop and send this at once."

She is a good sort, I presently remarked at my mirror as I tied my white tie.

Now, in looking back, I remember that the dinner was detestable. But though the dinner was vile, Aly was delicious. Not a philistine trace of preoccupation, no bourgeois attempt at excuse.

The attitude charmed me. Moreover, as I have lived as lizards live, on sunshine and dust, the quality of the dinner did not affect me in the least. It could not have been worse, though if it had been, what could

it have mattered since she was there? Later I learned that she had left it all to the maid. Thrice happy maid who, while not the rose, yet lived nearby.

Presently coffee came. The cloth was removed and she played a little; an air from *Louise*, the *Depuis le jour*; then more perfumery, Salomé's song in *Hérodiade*. After which, turning on the bench, she looked at me.

"I think the lady of the steps is a Miss Fellowes."

"Hello!" I exclaimed, surprised enough at the sudden entrance of the young woman I had pitched in the street.

From the bench she moved nearer. "You know of a Miss Fellowes?"

"Why, when was it? The day after I brought you back here, I looked in at a club where a gay sort of ass, a chap named Brevoort, told me of a Miss Fellowes who ran off with a chauffeur."

"The gay young man told you something else."

"He certainly did. He said she was a cousin of Nelly Chilton."

"And looked like her?"

"He thought her her ghost."

Aly laughed. "He must be a dear."

"But," I asked, "why do you think she is the lady of the steps?"

"I happened to see her and the probability occurred to me."

"It occurred to me that the lady of the steps was you and, if I had not known that at the time you were in Canada, it would have occurred to me that you were Brevoort's ghost; or no, not his ghost, the ghost he thought he saw."

"I am glad to be acquitted."

"But your innocence is not a proof of this other girl's guilt. I don't think it was she at all."

"Whom do you think it was?"

"Some fair unknown who possessed the extraordinary advantage of resembling both you and Nelly Chilton."

"Why then may it not be this Miss Fellowes?"

"Well, you see, don't you know, in view of the chauffeur she must be considerably out of it. Brevoort said she had not been seen or heard of since she danced the *pas de quoi*."

"Well?"

"Well, then, when Bradish hailed her as his Nelly, she would not have known him from Adam and as a consequence could not have retorted, 'Your Nelly is dead.' "

From the silver box Aly Bolton took a cigarette, lighted it, blew a ring of smoke, ran a finger through it and, incidentally, through my argument.

"Mr. Bradish is known to all New York. Miss Fellowes cannot be more out of it than I am and yet the first time I saw him I knew at once who he was."

"But my dear young woman. When——"

"Don't be so violent. I am not your dear young woman."

"My hated young woman then. When you saw Bradish in the Park, if he had hailed you as his Nelly, I will wager a bag of ducats you would not have assumed a *sainte n'y touche* attitude and told him what he knew."

"Yes, but, and to borrow your own mode of expression, you see, don't you know, Miss Fellowes may be

more conversational. Then also, and however the chauffeur may have disconnected her, none the less she is one of the family and if she read the papers she would have known that her cousin had married and died."

"Where did you see her?" I suddenly remembered to ask.

"In the street."

"How did you know she was Miss Fellowes?"

"I did not know. I had never heard of Miss Fellowes. But when I saw her I stopped and said, 'This is Mrs. Bradish, is it not?' and she said, no, she was Miss Fellowes."

"Like that! Without showing surprise or anything? Forgive me. I don't get the atmosphere."

"It was today. I was passing the cathedral. She was coming out. I stopped and spoke. She seemed annoyed, if anything. Then I saw she had a man with her. If I had known she was not alone, I would not have spoken at all."

"The chauffeur perhaps?"

"I can't tell you. I had but a glimpse of him. I should say he was fifty and probably English. He did not look like a chauffeur. This man looked like a viceroy. He had the grand air."

"We can bury the chauffeur then. But after she spoke, did she vanish?"

"Yes, in a cab."

"And before that. How did she look? Brevoort said she was ghastly."

"Her skin was the colour of lard. I could feel that she had suffered and suffered acutely. Yet then, an impression of that kind I often get. Perhaps people

are not always as debonair as they seem. But I had still another impression, that she was preoccupied about something. What, I cannot say. I might have picked her mind, but that, except when the picking is involuntary, I never do. Yet there is something that she is keeping to herself. Of that I am sure. I am sure, too, some day it will be known. Unfortunately for us all, sooner or later any secret we may have is bared."

Then for a while we discussed it, she maintaining that Bradish should be told, I maintaining that it would not matter now and relating the incidents of the night before.

"I know the magus by repute," she said at last. "His rags are a masquerade. If he is paid to open that door, he will. What he finds behind it is another matter."

I stood up. "You tell me that sooner or later all secrets will be bared?"

She must have seen it coming, for she called to her ostentatious cat.

But I did not propose to have Signor Matouchi interfere and I put it to her.

"When will mine be bared?"

Sagely she replied: "When its hour comes."

"That is not very comforting. I always picture the future as a greenroom of which the stage-manager is Time. The hours he motions to beset our lives are sad enough, but sadder still are those that are yet to come."

Quickly she looked at me. "Do you not think that that depends on ourselves? It is not the hours that are sad, it is we that sadden them."

As quickly I looked at her. "Bil Sayers said that. It is in *The Dawn*."

She gave me her hand. "Yes, I was quoting from it. Perhaps it is not very profound."

"Less profound than your eyes," I replied. "When you quote to me, quote to me with them."

Tolerably banal, I resumed to myself when I was at last in the street. Why is it, when a man is in love, he talks like a fool?

XXII

WHETHER the western garbage-lily bolted or not, is certainly immaterial. In any event, so many amazing incidents intervened that it was some time before my pen could pirouette before her. The quick lariat of her slang, the astonishing grace with which she leaped on a horse from behind, the aura of purity that carried her on a piebald mustang unspotted through the machinations of the worst men in the bad lands, for these virginal acrobatics my publishers had to wait.

Another young woman, the girl I had pitched in the street, primarily detained me. Pictured by Aly, she differed from the ghost that Brevoort had pursued and although, the night before, when she so surprisingly appeared, I could not take her seriously, yet, such are the clarifying processes of sleep, that it seemed to me Bradish should be shown the composite view. It seemed to me that she must be the lady of the steps. It seemed to me also that since she had a name, she must have also a local habitation.

Apart from which I was curious about him. The evil look in his eyes, the ugly twist to his mouth, the

highly uncomfortable idea of psychic confiscation, these impressions lingered, but only after the manner of nightmares that day has dispersed. I had been conscious of them. They had disturbed me. But afterthought had induced the idea that they were due to the malign influence of that Eblian rat, or else—and what was less fantastic and more reasonable—to my own attempt at interference and the hostility to the vermin that I had displayed.

Moreover, in the same manner that the strength and precision of my own impressions had diminished, it seemed to me that his own impressions might have lost their force, that I might find him, not as he had been, but perhaps less tedious than latterly he had become. Ever since the vision on the steps, he had been tiresome as only a self-centred invalid can be. For he was an invalid, mentally at least, with whose tediousness it was, no doubt, my duty to bear.

It is true that when a duty is not a joy I have shirked it and shirk it I always shall. The doing your duty for duty's sake seems to me sanctimonious cant. There ought to be joy in everything. There should be joy in that and not the sense of severe satisfaction which some people appear to get out of it. Anyway, brainworkers are different. Brainworkers represent a special form of life. For them to suffer themselves to be depressed is immoral.

It was with these Confucianisms in mind that I approached the great white staring house. Occupied as I was with them, I did not immediately notice Peters. He had come out from the basement before I saw him and then, to my amusement, I heard him urge me to go away.

Yet at once he must have thought better of it, incomprehensibly better, for he backed into an area, invisible from the upper windows, where he effected a dumb-show that would have been good business in my pantomime. His face, ordinarily wooden, was as full of expression as a Chinese mask and that, phenomenal as it is in an English servant, decided me. I marched in to where he was.

"Pardon me, sir, but Mr. Bradish's orders are that no one is to be admitted and Mr. Bradish particularly mentioned you, sir."

I looked at him and pulled at my nose.

At that, he clapped a hand to his mouth.

Immediately several things occurred to me. I realised that the grand Satanic séance was being held and that a man, straight as a grenadier and perhaps equally strong, was afraid of something which he did not understand. At the same time, I realised also that while courage is often the result of an entire absence of imagination, quite as often ignorance is the most potent factor of fear. Yet as I doubted that Peters had ever heard of the demoniac polka and as I was sure it would be too much for him if he had, I invented a palpable explanation, but, before producing it, I thought that for once he ought to have his say and I gave him the cue.

"What the devil is all this?"

I could see him jumping at it. His hand dropped.

"I don't know, sir. As God is my witness I don't. But have you noticed the windows, sir? All darkened, everyone in the 'ouse, even to those at the back and here in the basement. That isn't all; no, sir. The furniture taken out of the drawing-room, every stick of

it, and a fire burning there, a fire all night, and Mr. Bradish in there with two men. Yesterday a man came in a closed carriage, he is one of 'em. That man as was here the night you were, sir, he's been in the 'ouse ever since and he's another and there are two lambs. The man as came in the carriage he fetched them and a copper pot big enough to boil 'em both."

The witches' cauldron, I thought, and I thought too, whoever wrote *Macbeth* knew what he was writing about.

"And no one allowed in since then, sir, and none of us allowed out. Gedney, he's at the side door. I am here and Fletcher is at the back. Mr. Bradish hasn't eaten anything, not one of 'em has, not a crust, and we are none of us allowed above the basement floor and what they are doing there with that pot and those lambs and in the dark, God 'elp me, sir, I don't know."

"It is very simple," I said. "Just a little ceremony in commemoration of the landing here of the first cargo of schnapps. All good Knickerbockers piously observe it. Nothing to concern yourself about. Noticed any wind yet?"

"Wind, sir? In the 'ouse? With the windows all closed!"

"Well, if you do, pay no attention. It will be over shortly. It'll stop by tomorrow."

Whereupon, with something to think of, I turned on my heel and, in passing, glanced up at the house which, with the windows closed and the blinds so drawn that not a ray of light could enter, looked both sepulchral and hermetic. But only to me. A passer who thought of it at all, would have thought merely that the owner was away.

And yet would he? Not if he were the least psychic. For about the great white staring house, there was a sensation of chill, a savour of things damned, an impression of space, of shapes of sin, of monstrous crimes, of sacrilege and sorcery.

And yet, I reflected—and reflected, too, very erroneously—if an ordinary passer had succeeded in looking in, he could have witnessed nothing more than the mummeries of three men in a darkened room where, set in a circle marked by cabalistic designs, stood a tripod topped by a pot full of blood, before which one of the men, turning and bending to the north and south, was invoking enigmatic beings, calling to them in words rhythmic and unprintable. But nothing else, nothing whatever, except what the normal eye could not detect, a crew of elementals swarming in a wind that swept through the dismantled room and tore along the hallways of the empty house.

That would be all, unless the passer lingered, in which case he might behold a vapour rising from the cauldron, a vapour that wavered, ascended, descended, expanded and, gradually solidifying, assumed a human shape; the form of a girl translucently beautiful, immortally pale. If, after that, he did not shriek and run away, it would be because he was a brave man and lacked imagination.

Certainly I, too, lacked it. There was far more for that imbecile to see than I saw for him. There were rites curiously revolting, a ritual of perverted horror, all the turpitudes of the black mass accentuated by the infamies of black magic. Of that I did not learn until later.

At the time, in picturing pictures for my imaginary

passer, I had entered the Park where I found a bench free from nursemaids and babies. There the trees, the green, the grass, distracted me. I thought of hills and dales and winding lanes. I love the country when I am not in it. Wearily a squirrel eyed me and gingerly approached. I stretched my hand. A ball of fur and nothing! The squirrel had evaporated as suddenly as the lady of the steps. My thoughts went back to her, from her to Bradish, and I wondered. The always possible possibility of his becoming insane occurred to me, as it had occurred before. In those shadowy halls of his, Lyssa, goddess of the mad, goddess, too, of the elect, stood and waited. I could picture her also, picture her fanning him with her harlequin wings, binding him with her opal chains.

And for what? The tenuous theory of sins anterior and forgotten returned, but the immediate cause was clearer. He had everything, except one thing only. Certainly he was not Adonis. But what of it? When you are rich as Cræsus, though how rich Cræsus may have been I have no idea, yet when you are, then were your nose as big as a pillow and your face an open wound, always there are attractive women to call you Dear. You cannot keep them away with a club.

That was not enough for Jim Bradish. A dead girl, who had been in love with another man, was shoving him deeper and deeper into the shadowy halls, beckoning to Lyssa, calling to her, telling her to take him and bind him and hide him away.

What a fool! I reflected. What a bloody fool any man is who wants more than peace, fresh linen, a cigarette and a book! I thought of Aly. As addition to the little inventory I wanted her. But I knew, well enough,

she did not want me. If she had wanted me, and I could have kept my head, I might have said, Refuse me everything.

Then along the path before me came Marguerite of Navarre. She nodded, stopped, smiled, tapped me with her fan and said: "*Si vous voulez cesser d'aimer, possédez la chose aimée.*"

Or did I dream it? Like the squirrel she had gone and I was back at those halls, at the window there, looking in at the unholy horrors that they held, and again I wondered. Yet there was nothing earthly I could do, except prime Cally who never needed priming.

I might adventure that way, I thought, submit a hypothetical case and get my bearings.

On I went. At his house, a servant told me it was not the doctor's office hour.

"So much the better then. Take my hat and stick."

The negro backed but he rallied. "He isn't in."

I turned on my heel and was going up the street when I saw Cally affecting to hide behind a lamppost.

I stood and looked at him.

"Well," he said, pretending to pretend that he had not been there. "I saw the literary light at my door. Highly effulgent. I've read your last book."

"You must have been very idle. See here, I have a conundrum for you. What would you do if a patient went mad? Rob him?"

"I would cure him first. Thinking of Bradish, eh? You need not. There is not a possibility of it. He's not a genius. If he were like you now——"

"Or you."

"Always the retort courteous. Poole, you are the most engaging man I know. Come on in and smoke

a small cigar. I won't offer you a big one. I haven't the time."

At his office, he abandoned me in a dismal den where, as I kicked my heels, I reflected that since he was as confident about Bradish as all that, not only it was idle to bother but it would be beastly of me to tell tales out of school.

These meditations were interrupted. Cally returned cigarless. He had no cigars, he told me, and took one of mine which, hang him, he seemed to enjoy. As he pulled at it a remark he had made the last time I saw him occurred to me, and, with an eye to copy, I prodded him.

"What about that interesting case?"

"Which one?"

"You said George Eliot had written about something similar."

"Yaas, I remember now. When I mentioned it I had just come from the g.p. It was a case of catalepsy. Could you use that?"

"Hardly. Too much of an *hors d'œuvre*. The public wants roast beef and boiled potatoes. But though I can't feed out catalepsy, I'll take a bite of it myself."

"Sorry. Impossible to serve it today. It will keep though. Let me see. If you are still hungry, look in on Sunday."

But a man capable of that cigar trick was capable of anything, and I shied, little thinking how soon and how desperately I was to rush to him for aid.

XXIII

I FELT quite the loafer when, after leaving tricky little Cally, I entered the club where other chaps looked as I felt. Mainly polo men, they were healthy, innocent-minded young animals to whom a purveyor of cheap fiction was one of the literati, a being to be treated with respect and avoided with care. None the less, at the window where they sat, they made room for me, swapped stories with each other, stories as innocent as themselves, and yet told with such a flourish of *By George!* and *I tell you!* with such shrieks of laughter and such unfathomable good fellowship, that I will be shot if I did not begin to feel as innocent as they and went with them on and up to dinner, a noisy catch-as-catch-can sort of an affair, at which some of them became a bit superhilarious, but where I kept my head.

I can truthfully testify to that because of subsequent events which even now I vividly recall. The polo chaps were all to be off on the morrow, for a match somewhere or other, at Point Judith I think, but, for the evening, they had planned to go to a roof and as in the interim I had talked not shop but horses, their respect for the literati had so measurably diminished that they were for having me chip in. I agreed of course and then managed to lose them, after which I went on and up to the temporary temple of Beelzebub.

Beelzebub or, more exactly, Baal Zebub, a Syrian demon, was lord of flies and, I remember thinking at the time, possibly lord of fireflies also. For the temple, previously dark, was bright. Through curtains at the windows came the gleam of electric bulbs and it oc-

curred to me that in the great dining-hall a feast was in progress, an infernal orgy, at which to the right and left of Satan's legate, sat the quick and the dead; that there, with that saffron monster of a magus, were bride and groom; Nelly Chilton summoned from her grave and Bradish conjecturing the chill raptures of her bloodless lips, the frigid emptiness of her ghostly arms, the renewed and spectral wedding.

I thought of that, of more too I dare say, as I stood on the stoop. But at once the door opened. Gedney was there. Beyond was Peters. On the stair was Bradish.

"Hey!" he threw at me.

Gedney took my hat and stick. He seemed catlike as ever. From Peters the Chinese mask had been lifted. His face was as dumb as before. But on that stair, Bradish had an air and an expression so reassuring that it upset me.

"Gedney, take Mr. Poole's orders."

In the Park I had dreamed that Marguerite de Navarre addressed me. On the stair, Bradish seemed equally unaccountable. What I had really expected, I do not remember but I suppose it was the unexpected. Well, there it was. Instead of odours of the black mass and savours of a satanic feast, the normal confronted me and such was my mental somersault, such rather are the abysses of human nature, that finding the banal where I had awaited the demoniac, I strangled an oath.

"Come on in here," Bradish was saying.

Vacating the stair, he indicated the library. There again I looked at him. The evil that had been in his eyes, the ugly twist about his mouth, the suggestions of

an alien and obsessing entity that he had exhaled, these malignities had gone. Even the spider had diminished. It was no longer crimson but dull, lifeless as, in the old days, it used to be.

Reassured as to that, but vastly perplexed, I let fly.

"I was here at noon and could not get in. You were closeted with that rat I suppose. Where is he?"

He half raised a hand. "I don't know. I don't care. But I can tell you this, he did it."

Now, though, Gedney, with his catlike tread, was coming in.

In my bewilderment, not at him, but at what Bradish had said, I flopped in a chair.

"It cost me a pretty penny, I can tell you that also, but I can tell you, too, it was uncommonly cheap."

Gedney had gone and I reached for one of the serenades he had brought.

"Then the door was opened?"

"Well," he surprisingly replied, "that depends on how you look at it."

"But as yet," I angrily protested, "I don't know how to look or what to look at. Either the Satanism succeeded or it did not. Which was it?"

"It did both."

At that, and feeling perhaps that only spirit forces could sustain me, I emptied my glass.

He was still standing, but coming to the table he poured out a little gin, watered it discreetly, sat down and sipped. He sipped with the comfortable air of an old woman drinking tea.

I do not know why that should have angered me further, but he seemed so entirely at his ease that I barked.

"See here. I hate rows unless I make them myself."

He looked over his glass at me. "Yes?"

I nodded at him. "I can promise you this, there will be one unless you stop beating about the bush."

"There was a bush, but it's gone. She's alive."

"Alive! What are you talking about?"

He put down the glass. "About Nelly of course and I always knew it. From the start I knew it. From the moment I woke up and saw that nurse looking at me, I did not believe that anything had happened at all. Afterward I realised that I had been hurt and that Mike was dead and I was sorry enough about that. But, as for Nelly, I never believed it. All gammon and spinach, that's what I thought it. I have told you so time and again."

I had it at last. Long since overstrained, the Satanism had unhinged him. The man was demented, therefore to be humoured and I nodded again, this time pleasantly enough and soothingly answered, "Of course, of course."

He sipped again. "Yes, today the magus confirmed it. He and I and an occultist that he had in, engaged in an enterprise that was frankly revolting. In that room across the hall things were done that made my flesh creep. There were others that nauseated me. There was a sort of double shuffle, the crapulous and the sanguinary heel-and-toeing with the invisible. I throw a veil over it and all the more readily because I swore I would. Apart from that, there were influences about, influences that had come or been loosed there. What they were is beyond me. I could not see them, but I felt them. It was as though a lot of bats were swarming about me in the dark. It was ignoble and it was horrible. But there was nothing more, or

rather there was nothing else. The fact that there was nothing more threw the old cock in a fury. He spluttered at me like a hellcat. I got it out of him then. Nelly did not appear because she could not appear and could not appear because she is alive."

I smiled and said nothing. What was there to say? But in smiling I revised my inexpert diagnosis. Bradish was not mad; he was far worse, he was silly.

"Yes," he resumed, "how could she materialise when she was material already? But the old cock did not stop there. He cursed and swore that I had inveigled him into attempting to evoke a spirit that was not a spirit, that I knew was not a spirit and I had done it out of vulgar curiosity, to see what could be evoked, an act, he said, that might have been mortally disastrous to all concerned. His adjutant was as spluttery as he."

And that was the way he wriggled out of it, I thought. But I said, "I don't suppose they fell on you tooth and nail."

As Bradish could have knocked their heads together, knocked the heads of a dozen like them, the supposition was extravagant. He took it gravely.

"They were viperish enough for anything and though I paid them what I had promised, they reviled me in terms that at least had the merit of being new. I naturally protested that——"

"I dare say you did," I interrupted. "But not that you had been rooked. You were plucked like a pigeon. Those rats knew beforehand that there would be no materialisation and worked on your credulity after planning to put the failure and the burden of it on you."

"No, not at all. Their rage was not feigned. Rats

they may be. They are not Salvinis. When I protested that it had been formally certified to me that my wife was dead and that she had been put in a vault at Chilton Manor, the magus spat at me, 'Go and look.' "

"The only sensible thing that has come from him. I wish you would. Go tomorrow. The day after, loan me Peters for an hour and we can start for Spain."

"I shall go tomorrow and you will go with me."

"Nothing of the kind. I have had enough of this tomfoolery. Take Peters, or take Gedney, or take both. They can help you shift things about but I won't. Besides, you won't need to shift anything. The coffin is at the entrance, on the right. Get the door open and you will find it."

"There is always a door, isn't there? Well, I will open this one."

"You have not opened any yet and when you do open this one you won't want to open any more. But for the Lord's sake get it over tomorrow. Then, hurrah for Spain!"

"I am not going to Spain. I shall look for Nelly."

"Well then, after looking in Hades, you can hunt through heaven."

"I shall go about," he unheedingly continued, "I shall——"

"Meet Miss Fellowes," I put in.

"What?" he put back.

"Mrs. Chilton's niece. Ever hear of her?"

"What are you bringing her in for?"

"The other day Brevoort said he had seen her somewhere. In a shop, I think."

"He was drunk. She has not been in this country for years."

"She might have returned."

"When she was quite young she ran away with a green-grocer, or was it a groom? I have forgotten. Anyway she ran away from him, ran over to Europe where she has been running ever since. Mrs. Chilton told me."

"Did she say she looked like her daughter?"

"Like Nelly? No. Why do you ask?"

"I thought she might be the lady of the steps."

"That was Nelly herself."

"I won't argue over it. But hadn't she any other cousins? There must be other Fellowes hereabouts."

"A lot of bores also. If you have anything up your sleeve, out with it, but don't sit there asking stupid questions. You make me nervous."

I gave it to him then about Aly's little adventure, about her, "This is Mrs. Bradish?" and of the vexed, "No, I am Miss Fellowes."

I could see him taking it in, see him turning it over and I capped it.

"You may be sure that some Miss Fellowes or other is the lady of the steps."

But in turning it, he must have seen something else. He threw it back at me.

"No, all that is sheer nonsense."

He lifted his glass and I looked in mine. In it floated the earlier surprises, the amazement I had experienced when, on entering the house, I had been met, not by the sound of shaken bells, the muffled riot of a Satanic orgy and the spectacle of the spectre bride, but by the numbing fingers of the commonplace.

From the infernal to the banal, how brief the bridge! At that platitude, the memory of a verse from the one American writer who could have adequately pictured the episode recurred to me and I misquoted it.

“‘Is all we feel or think or seem,
But a dream within a dream?’”

“What are you mumbling?” he asked.

But I had had enough. I left him to his morrow, little suspecting that there also Poe would have been of use.

XXIV

IN and out of the hall when, on that morrow, I returned there, were wiry, aproned men whom Peters directed in the task of re-establishing the black and yellow room as it had been before the parlour game of hide and go seek.

Mr. Bradish, he told me, was motoring and would I wait, sir? Of his experiences and presumable emotions since he unburdened himself in the area, not a word. An automaton was before me. The man had gone.

It was after six then and in the library I renewed my acquaintance with Hugo's *Oriëntales*, in which to the hum of mandolins, the poet leads you through the Andalusia that he knew and sang.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Poole is in the library. Thank you, sir.”

In the silent house, deserted now by those aproned men, Granada had been before me. I saw the Plaza de Toros, heard the shouts. Then, suddenly the Al-

hambra faded, the bullring crumbled, the shouts were stilled.

"She is not there!"

Bradish, a cap on, took it off, dropped it, removed his gloves.

"Just as I told you."

Astonishment is dumb. I said nothing. I could not say anything. Then it occurred to me that I had not heard him aright.

"What's all that?"

"The coffin is open and empty. Empty! And there is nothing emptier than an empty coffin."

He had sat down on that chair from Delatour and was folding and refolding his gloves which presently he put on the table.

"It is just as I told you."

The repetition of any remark weakens it. Besides he had told me nothing of the kind. In addition, and although I hate the word, I knew it was impossible. A corpse cannot rise from a coffin. I doubt if even a live Hercules could open one from within. Then I had it.

"Look here! You promised those rats a fortune. No doubt you gave them something on account."

He leaned over, took a cigarette. "What I paid has nothing to do with it."

"Everything. To guard against any Stop thief on your part, they arranged matters before the tea-party was given, then when it fizzled, as they knew it would fizzle, they cried Cheat at you. You protested. At that they told you to go and look. Well, you have looked. You found nothing because what there was had been removed."

He twirled the cigarette. "The grass before the

vault was a foot high. If within the last few days they had been there, if anyone had been there, the grass could not have looked as it did."

I turned it around at him. "Did you ever hear of Heraclitus? Heraclitus died of laughing, literally of laughing, at the stupidity of his friends."

Bradish lit the cigarette. "I am not one of them then. Perhaps you are. I know what you are going to say, that they got fresh sods of grass and planted them for me. They did nothing of the kind. I looked into that also."

Drinking the smoke, he resumed: "Nelly never was there at all. I felt that from the start and what I felt the magus confirmed. Now where is she?"

"Ask that rat. If he can raise the dead, raising grass must be easy for him. If it were I, I would prosecute him, not for bilking me, I would not want it known what a bloody fool I had been, but for rifling a sepulchre."

He flicked his ashes. "You need not talk the way you write. Rifling a sepulchre! The dust on the coffin was an inch thick. Perhaps you will say they planted that also."

"It would be only artistic of them and on a par with everything else. The confidence game with which they gulled you, I cannot but admire. You are swallowing it still and crying for more."

My shots, such as they were, may have told. He seemed to be weakening and I gave him another.

"See here! Send for that rat, offer him a release in full and another cheque if he will tell you what he did with the remains."

"If he were the crook you think him, he would accept

the offer and say he dumped them in the river. I admit he is a queer fish. But he is not a crook. He does not need to be one. The man is a conjurer and he knows his trade. The other night, after you had gone, I had him in here again. He sat at this end of the table. At the farther end was that inkstand. It must weigh five pounds. He beckoned, said something, I don't know what, and the inkstand slid of itself the length of the table to him."

"So you think. It did not slide of itself. It was moved by elementals. That night I could have sworn they were crawling all over him. I have thought since then that some of them must have crawled on you. You looked it. I don't mean to compliment you, but you looked like a fiend."

At that, or at something else, a memory perhaps, he shifted, uneasily I thought, turned away and then to me.

"We are wandering all over the grounds."

"Yes, we would be much better off in Spain."

"Leave me in the lurch then. I am going to find Nelly."

The faith that moved mountains! Instead of my incredulity weakening him, his confidence was weakening me. That confidence, irrational, illogical, utterly insane, had been superb. When he heard the girl was dead he did not believe it. That disbelief the sight of some damsel in the Park had confirmed. When the young person reiterated what others had asserted, he had tried sorcery to get the girl back. That failing he had looked for her in her coffin. In its emptiness his confidence was renewed. Now he was going to find her! Among the living he was going to hunt for

the dead! What could you do, what could anyone do with a chap like that? I saw but one course and I took it.

"Jim, you are sublime!"

He must have thought I was guying him. He shook his head.

"I can see it all from your angle. I do not blame you because you cannot see it from mine. It would be phenomenal if you could. It is not a thing I can analyse. It is not an idea, it is a sensation, like joy or like dread, which one experiences and cannot describe, no, nor share."

I dressed it a bit and gave it back.

"It is the inner voice, the voice that makes the hero, makes the martyr."

"And the fool," he put in. "I may be one. You think so and Cally would. If Cally knew what you know he would want to lock me up. But a fool may be wise in his folly and time alone can show whether I am an imbecile in mine."

He was taking it then so sagely that a recompense was due and lightly I produced it.

"Spain can go hang. I'll see you through."

I made the promise as one promises the moon. His quick and rapid fire in defence of the Eblian rat had confused, it had not converted me. The girl was dead. That her tomb had opened and her remains had flown were matters temporarily inexplicable but eternally subordinate. The girl was dead. Yet that fact, which was the cardinal fact, Bradish could not and would not accept. Readily I might promise to see him through. But see him through to what?"

"And there I am," he was saying, "I am up a tree."

That tree, how well I knew it! I was as high up in it as he and my perch was more rickety. He had faith to sustain him and I had none. What I did have was a range of vision superior to his, because impersonal, and along it I looked. The horizon was dark. Not a sign of help. Not the hope of a ladder.

"Dinner is served, sir."

In the old days of the grand manner, before the battle began the young officer put on his gloves. He put on the white gloves that tradition required. In the great crises of life one should always dress for dinner. Evening clothes have a steadying effect. At the announcement, I regretted I was in flannels.

At table I forgot them. Very thoughtfully, Peters had provided a cru from the Garonne, which while not summery, had an amplitude that was majestic. In its red kisses were art, literature, the hum of lutes, and all of them enchanting the palate, caressing it with combined enthrallments. The sorceries of the red magic brightened the horizon. Afar was a gleam that looked like a sail or, more serviceably, a ladder.

Yet, not being Archimedes, I omitted to cry Eureka!

Instead I said and casually enough: "How did you get in?"

The red necromancies may have lowered Bradish from that tree. They may have lifted him higher. In any event he was not at the moment where he had been. Vaguely he looked at me.

Ordinarily the fact that Peters and Gedney were present would have prevented any intimate conversation. But as they knew about the visit to the tomb, I reconstructed it.

"The vault was locked, was it not?"

"Oh! Yes! Well, I sent Fletcher for a man to open it. It took some time."

"Afterward, you locked it again?"

"Naturally."

"What did you do with the key?"

He turned. "What did I do with the key, Gedney?"

"You left it in the padlock, sir."

"Who is at the manor?" I asked.

"Nobody. It is boarded up. Mrs. Chilton wanted to rent it. I had my lawyers take a lease of it from her. Why do you ask?"

"I shall be going there tomorrow."

He sat back. "That's mighty nice of you. You may find something that I missed. Take Fletcher and the car."

I stood up. "There are one or two things I have to do beforehand. Send the car to my shop at noon and if I find anything——"

"Fetch it straight here."

He turned again. "Gedney, a cab for Mr. Poole."

XXV

THE cab took me to a noble mansion, an exalting lift to a door.

In the sorceries of the red wine from the blue river, it was Aly Bolton I had seen with the ladder. Aly assisting and we might all climb down, though what lay at the foot of the tree was enigmatic as the mysteries of Eleusis. Theories I had had. One after another they had come. One after another they had gone. If Aly balked and refused then, until we were all dead, it might be that only the tree would remain.

In looking back at it now, I realise, what I should have realised then, that there are mysteries it is wiser to ignore than to elucidate. In the greenroom of the future where the hours fall in line, there are many that wound, there are some that console. Time, that stages the hours which inform our lives, had sent Bradish many charged with darts and might have sent him others that would have dulled their pain. The grave of all things has its violet. Yet, for that lessened mourning to replace the blacker trappings of one's woe, a grave there must be. To the ineluctable, the strongest yield. It is suspense that daunts us all.

In looking back now I see that clearly enough, yet more clearly still I see that instead of helping, I harmed. The fact that my intentions were good only aggravates the offence. The best intentioned people are the most insupportable. "*Pas de zèle*," said Talleyrand. Why did I need to show any?

But though now with riper years, I ask myself these things, I know that whatever happens, happens because it had to happen and because it could not happen otherwise. There is consolation in that, there always is in philosophy and one can find consolation nowhere else except, as a poet said, in the dictionary.

"Yes, sir."

Moonfaced, a little maid was looking at me. How long she had been looking it is awkward to conjecture. After reaching the door, the possibilities of the ladder had swarmed about me. In considering them I had forgotten I had knocked. I had not seen the door open or the moonfaced maid. I was in the condition of a chess player who answers a question minutes after it has been put.

But even as the absent player awakes so did I awake and in awakening I smiled.

Was Miss Bolton visible?

Then presently I was tickling a gentleman who resented it so little that he scaled me, perched on my shoulder and was purring ostentatiously when graciously, as she did everything, the lady of the ladder appeared.

Then I also purred. "I love your cat. I love your flat. I love—lalage. *Dulce ridentem, dulce loquentem, Lalagen amabo.* Horace said that, or something like it. Lalage was a young woman who charmed his leisures. I am sure you are much better looking. But sweetly you smile, as she smiled. Sweetly you talk, as she talked. If sweetly you do not blush, as sweetly she must have blushed, it is because I headed myself off in time. Yes, thank you, I will sit down and thank you, yes, I will smoke."

"You are thinking of something else than that improper young woman."

Before I answered I took and lighted a cigarette. Even then I could not go at it like that, all of a sudden. The art of life, as of literature, consists in easy transitions and I fell back on Bil Sayers.

"Yes, *The Dawn*. Recently I was looking it over again. A very admirable performance."

I coughed and resumed: "Bil Sayers writes his books as the Moslems built their mosques, mixing musk with mortar that the whole structure should be perfumed."

I did not improvise that, or rather it was my usual improvisation, one that I had played many a time and oft to the tune of other works, other poems. But, though she had not blushed before, she flushed a little

then and I knew my hackneyed performance had the merit of pleasing her, as the picturesque always does please the artist.

She shook a tapering finger at me. "That is not what you have in mind."

How lovely she looked! Adorably constructed and constructed too to be adored, as she sat there, her fair face slightly flushed, one bare arm on the table, the other supporting her head, I wished I were Greuze.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, you see, you know, after I left here the other evening, a problem occurred to me. Why is it when a man is in love he talks like a fool?"

"That is not it either," she said, and I thought the flush deepened.

That annoyed me. She knew perfectly well that I wanted her. There was no news in that. But it was vexatious of her to accept my own estimate of myself. It was an estimate which she should have returned to me corrected and revised. But that was not Aly's way and in my annoyance I let go.

"Why do you ask what I am thinking when you know without being told? I am thinking of you and a ladder. I am up a tree and I want to climb down."

"Is the tree on the Hudson?"

Then, as I nodded, she added: "You brought it in with you. But whether it is an oak or an aspen, the tree of knowledge or the tree of the golden fruit, you must tell before I can say whether anything I may do will be of use."

I put the whole thing before her; the *danse macabre*, the rat's assertion that the girl was alive, the visit to

the vault, the empty coffin, the profundities of Bradish's prodigious faith.

"And I thought him mad," I concluded. "He may be saner than I. But you can see now the tree on which we sit. Barring a miracle, he alone or I alone or both together cannot, whatever we contrive, get behind the puzzle of what became of the corpse. It is true, he will have it that there was no corpse and there is his amazing faith. Of course, without a crystal or even with one, I cannot make him see and hear what I did. I cannot make him hear the physician, as I heard him, pronounce the girl dead. I cannot make him see her, as I saw her, in her coffin. It is not that he doubts my word, he prefers the testimony of his own intuitions and what is one to do with a chap like that? Between us, one or the other is wrong. He thinks I am, I know he is. For assuming what has happened time and again, that the girl was in a trance and was buried alive, assuming all that, then, if after being put in the vault, consciousness returned, she would have died of suffocation in the coffin. She could not have got from it. But assuming even that she did, she could not have got out of the vault. No one would have heard her calls for help. Moreover if anyone did hear, it is quite on the cards that they would have shrieked and run away. The problem therefore is just this: I want to know what became of the body, Bradish wants to know what became of the girl."

Aly looked up. "To solve the problem, you spoke of a miracle. What did you mean?"

I shook my head. "You don't need to ask, you know. The miracle is you, Aly Bolton. You are a

living, breathing miracle, a miracle of beauty in a miracle of flesh."

"Also, there is a Mr. Chandos Poole, who is a highly lyrical young man."

"Yes," I told her, "and a trifle vatic to boot. For he can tell you one thing which you cannot foresee. He intends to be far more lyric than he is. He intends to be so lyric that seraphs will take up the burden of his lay and strum it at you from their golden harps."

That was an improvisation and poor as every improvisation is that has not been practised and rehearsed in advance. Conscious of which, I coughed again and took another cigarette.

With an indifference so vividly incandescent that I could have caught and kissed her until she swooned and died, she stood up, left the room, followed by her ostentatious cat. Then almost at once she returned with a wicker-covered gourd of glass which she said, and which I did not believe, she had given herself, and which contains the liquid *sol bémol* that mortals—mortals who know—call mandarin liqueur.

She gave me a thimble. I lapped it, poured a drop on my forefinger and offered it to Signor Matouchi. He sniffed and bit me. Any kindness is repaid in pain.

Aly, who had had half a thimble, put down her little glass.

"Who was at the manor the night of the funeral?"

Nursing the bite, I told her. "Bradish, who was unconscious, a nurse who was dumb, a servant who was deaf and a mechanic who was dead."

For a moment she considered the picture. Then she tried to frame it.

"It would fit in your ghost story."

I shook my head.

She smiled and smoothed her hair. "You do not think so now. You will later. At present you are too near it. It lacks perspective for you. But let me ask. Why not make a scenario of it?"

"For whom?"

"Well," she said, still smiling, still smoothing her hair. "There is Bil Sayers. You seem to like his work."

The manner in which it afterward came about has nothing to do with the present document, but later a novel of Bil Sayers appeared which I have already cited. Entitled *The Halls of Eblis*, it presents many of the incidents that are given here. Otherwise it is superiorly dramatic, the dénouement being totally different from what actually occurred. That is as it should be. The climaxes of fiction are logical, those of life are not. In fiction matters turn out as they ought to. In life it is just the reverse.

I throw that in now to get rid of it. At the time I was not thinking of fiction but of a corpse that had assumed a fictional aspect of life. I wanted to be rid of that also. I wanted it safely reburied. Meanwhile, nursing the ungrateful bite, I looked over at Aly. She seemed to be nursing the scenario which she had suggested.

I brought her back. "I have shown you the tree. Will you supply the ladder?"

She looked up. "A descent is always possible, but is it wise?"

"Why do you say that? Do you see anything?"

"No, I am in the tree with you. But you want to climb down and I do not."

Surprisedly I stared. "Why don't you want to?"

"I might disturb things."

"Things!" I amazedly repeated. "What things?"

"The things at the bottom. They are so quiet. It is wrong to disturb them. It is always wrong to stir the silent things that do not speak. The world is full of noise and sin. The silent things only wish for silence. It is wicked to go down and harm them where they hide."

"But," I protested, "you move me to tears."

I said it jestingly, but at once I could have said it in earnest. Her eyes had filled. I saw her tears. None the less she smiled. It was very curious. She was both smiling and crying, crying because she could not help it and smiling that I might not be distressed. It was not only curious, it was affecting. I leaned toward her.

"What was it that you saw—down there?"

She brushed her eyes. "Nothing. I have not looked. It is what I fear to see."

"And what is that?"

"I do not know. I only know I dread it."

"But you want to help. You said so."

"Yes, I said that."

"Then will you?"

"I will help, but I will not harm."

"Aly Bolton, listen to me. You will harm if you do not help."

"How will I harm?"

"Banality kills. Suspense is more treacherous. It may drive Bradish insane."

At that she made a little pathetic motion and I added: "Will you go there with me tomorrow?"

She pressed her hands together almost as though she were wringing them. I loosened and kissed them and looked up at her.

"Will you?" I repeated.

"Yes," she said longly. "I will go."

Her eyes were still wet and why were they? Though I asked she did not tell, perhaps she could not. But they were still wet when, our simple plans simply made, she saw me to the door.

XXVI

I AWOKE to the crash of worlds, to the trumpets of the last judgment. In the sarabands of lightning there was an expansiveness, a continuity and a glory that made the black sky gold. A picture torn from the mythologies, the war of titans and of gods, I went to the roof to enjoy it. The lightning there was raspberry, the sky when not a gold field was a tent of crêpe. Between was scudding lingerie, and I held my hair on as I stood, like a valkyr I hope, in the howling and deluvian rain.

The night before, the vibrance of Aly's sensitiveness had affected me. I dreamed of undergrass grown overgreen where, in bogs of leprous scum, devils danced and ghouls were coldly crouching. Ordinarily I would have taken them straight to the workshop. The crashing worlds interfered. When, over the Palisades, a curtain had risen, when the lightning had rescaled the sky, when gods and titans had slunk back to the classical dictionaries, and the air aquiver with their surge and rout was wholly divine, I could only rush

down, dry my hair and change my clothes. It was high noon and Aly waited.

The flight through the suburbs, the shoot up the Hudson, pictures that I did not see, incidents that did not occur, the antiquarian will set forth in Bil Sayers' novel. He is the poet of this matter of which I am but the clerk. For the dull-as-ditchwater effect of the present account I offer therefore no apologies. On the contrary. The effect has its value. Every scrupulous critic knows that no history can be reliable unless it is packed with yawns.

Among the simple plans of the night before, luncheon at the village inn had been included. Since then, Aly had otherwise ordered. When the exquisite girl got with me in the car, there got with us a basket in which were sandwiches and a thermos bottle of coffee and water, and a very good drink I have always found it,—though, to take the taste from my mouth of one or two of the surprises that awaited us, I would have said Thank you to a glass of brandy.

Meanwhile, as Aly entered the car, I looked in her eyes. The rain had dried them. They were blue as the sky and bluer. On her face the slight flush of the night before persisted, maintained there perhaps by the consciousness of the ladder. But, as the car flew on, these delicacies lost themselves behind a motor veil and it was not until we reached the manor that I could feast again upon them.

The house, which had had an ugly, comfortable air, exhaled then the more penetrating atmosphere of emptiness and desertion. The front door was walled, the candid windows were barred and the grounds which on the funeral day had seemed none too smart,

were the unkempt. Desolation brooded there. Only the vault was unaltered. In the days of the landed gentry, the Chiltons had been a high-handed, high-headed lot. What remained of them that vault contained.

We had left Fletcher, the car, the basket and the veil on the road beyond and, as we approached the vault, I heard her say, perhaps to me, perhaps to herself:

"There it is, exactly as I saw it."

There, too, was the long grass of which Bradish had told, a bit trampled since his own excursion, and in the padlock was the key concerning which Gedney had informed him. Whether the downpour of the morning had already rusted it is now immaterial but it would not turn. As, at the time, I could crack a hickory nut with my fingers, I knew that where I failed Fletcher would do no better and I was for sending him for the man of the day before, when Aly tried it. The key turned, the hasp loosened, the padlock fell and through the then opened door the chill breath of the dead came at us.

From before it Aly retreated. The flush then had gone, but though at the moment she was pale she must have been resolute for she rallied and entered. The back of the vault was dark, the north side was dim but on the south side, on the lower slab, where I had seen the coffin put, light entered with her and I saw again that bier. But not as I had seen it when I followed it there. It was open, it was empty, and back to me swam the remark that Bradish had made:

"There is nothing emptier than an empty coffin."

Aly, who needed no guidance, no prompting, no

word from me, removed a glove, put her bare hand on the coffin and looked away, looked up. At what? What did she see? Her lips moved, but they may have gone dry. She moistened them and so absent was her expression that I am sure she did it unconsciously. Her upper teeth were pressed on her lower lip. I could see the edges, see too the facial muscles contracting the corners of her mouth. Still she looked up, but through eyelids that had closed. Hers was the rapt look I had read of and never seen. Then presently, with an intake of the breath, her eyes opened, she turned, left the vault, but stood by me while I recovered the padlock and fastened it again.

Finishing with it, I turned to her. She was putting on her glove and she finished with that before she spoke, preluding what she did say with a little motion, a gesture slight, perhaps involuntary, as though either expressing regret for what she was about to tell, or else disclaiming responsibility for it, a little gesture that I could interpret as I pleased.

"There is a man, tall, slim, handsome, with the brave air of a young prince marching past lifted swords out from a tapestry of the renaissance. Who is he?"

"Go on."

"He went to the coffin, swept heaped flowers from it, raised the top. He lifted it so readily it could not have been closed. She lay there white, motionless, dead. He bent over her, bent closer, kissed her, straightened, moved aside, moved back, bent to her again, put his arms about her, lifted her from the coffin, carried her out, carried her into the night. I saw no more. Who is he?"

"Austen."

"The man who was in love with her?"

"And with whom she was in love."

But I did not ask were she sure. I did not ask whether there were the chance of error. On the morning when she awoke in my workshop, I brought her coffee, and a cup. From that cup she had evolved a picture of me as a child, of my grandfather who was living then, of the room in which he sat. No, I did not ask were she sure. Nor did I marvel at the psychometry with which I was familiar. It was the ladder. It was for that I had brought her there. I merely exploded.

"So that is it then! But why did he carry her away? Where did he carry her? What did he do with her when he got her there? He could only have buried her again and not that it can make the slightest difference to her now, but when she lived, had she thought of herself as a corpse, an idea I am sure that never entered her head, but if it had she would have said: Put me with my people. Why then did he carry her away? Why did he profane her with kisses? What Bradish did was sacrilege. What Austen did seems to me worse. Why did he do it?"

"The magus said she was alive."

"But I saw her dead. You saw her dead. I remember your very words 'There she lay, white, motionless, dead.'"

She made another little gesture, just a motion with her hand.

"But because I can sometimes see things, it does not follow that I can explain them."

"No, of course not. Besides, in asking a string of imbecile questions, I was putting them to myself. I

was trying to clarify my own ideas and I cannot, I'll be shot if I can."

She got away from it. "Don't you think we might give that poor man a sandwich or two? He drove so well."

In exploding the questions, I had been too full of them to notice, but I saw then that she looked completely fagged, as one must I suppose after such an expenditure of nervous force.

"We might have a few ourselves. I know I would say Thank you for a glass of brandy. But I would say it for you, you look utterly done."

None the less and however exhausted, she saw to it that Fletcher had his sandwiches and, with them, a glass of coffee and water.

Then, for a while, the basket between us, we sat on the steps of the house where she tormented a bit of bread. She was not hungry she said, except for cigarettes and as she sat and smoked I saw about her that air of languor I had noticed the first time I was at her flat and where she may have been psychometrising also.

In watching her, I stuffed and, at the same time, reviewed the picture series revealed by her latest *tour de force*. Charged with surmises, with hypotheses, with interrogations, the pictures passed before me. For my own edification I tried to imagine what had occurred before they were taken and what had happened afterward. Considered in the ensemble they were illustrations for an unwritten tale of Hoffman, etchings for some story lost or strayed from the portfolio of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, vignettes for an unpublished manuscript of Poe.

From them, I turned to her.

"Last night I dreamed of dancing devils and crouching ghouls. I don't wonder now. Austen cannot be plural but he is certainly singular. Singular! He is epic. The imagination reels from before him. For what lethean farewells, for what plutonian embraces, for what lemurianisms did he go to the vault that night? What drew him there and what having drawn him there, induced him to take her away? Barring the old tales of mediæval monasteries, there is nothing like it anywhere. Austen is not epic merely, he is unique. I should like to have a word with him. Bradish certainly will."

The sibyl sighed. "Poor man, his path has been hard and is to be harder yet. Heretofore it has been a path, a very uncertain path, but still a path on which there was light. Now it is a blind alley."

She paused, sighed again and stood up. "How wrong it is to stir the silent things that do not wish to speak."

Through the long green afternoon, back to the sordid city, back from sepulchral visions to the trivialities of the everyday, on we flew. We flew whirlingly, noisily and yet silent as the things that should not stir. Aly could not talk. One of the rare beings that never complain and always console, her head must have been splitting, but she said nothing of it. Only, she could not talk and, at her house, I thought her hand trembled when she reached it to tell me goodbye.

The white staring house came next. In the library there, Bradish resembled a great caged beast of the jungle, a wounded lion, with nothing for his mind to chew on, nothing except the marvel of the empty bier.

"Well?" he threw at me. "Find anything?"

"Everything. But before you can grasp it, I must tell you that Miss Bolton——"

"Damn Miss Bolton. What do you mean by everything?"

For that damn, ordinarily I would have damned him, but on the top branch of the tree where he prowled he needed indulgence. I let it go therefore and gave it to him.

"Austen took her."

Open-mouthed he fell back and clutched first at a chair, then at the table, all the hate, all the virulence, all the murderous jealousy of the male mounting and flaming in that spider on his face. Instantly hideous, he shook. Yet then, one has to recognise, that in beasts, in men, in women, jealousy, the most primitive of emotions, is the most blinding of all. At that moment, Bradish, mentally, was trampling Austen beneath his heels, gouging his eyes out with them, trampling him to death.

That sweet surcease not being practicable, at all events not then, he gave a sort of yelp, looked at me, I dare say without seeing me, and disdaining the bell, called mightily.

"Hey! Peters! Gedney!"

From the hall beyond, both hastened, Gedney with his catlike tread, Peters with his mask of wood.

Pointing a finger like a pistol at the latter,

"Er-er," he stuttered, "a Mr. Austen, he called here, left a card. Find it."

"Yes, sir," said the mask. "Thank you, sir."

"And Gedney," he called at the catman. "Fletcher waiting? Tell him to wait."

"I say, old chap," I put in, threshing about for what I could say. "You rather left this business to me. Now don't you think——"

"Think!" he roared. "I have done nothing but think. Now I shall act."

I ran a spoke in at him. "He won't be at home."

"I'll damn soon find out."

"If you please, sir."

Peters with a card on a tray, was presenting it.

Bradish snapped it up, snapped it back.

"Look him up in the telephone book. Say I am coming. Say James Bradish is coming at once. Say——"

"Yes," I threw in. "Tell him to clear the decks and prepare for action."

Fiercely he turned on me. "I wish——"

"So do I. I wish you had some sense. Can't you see that to get him, there will have to be a surprise attack. Have Peters tell him to call to quarters and he will be ready for you. Take him off his guard, you idiot."

The strategy was a douche. From before it he backed. He did not like it. I could see that. I could see that what he wanted was to sail right in, flags flying, trumpets blowing, batteries unmasked, fair play and be hanged to you. But into his dislike for any strategy the idea must have filtered that Austen himself was not playing fair, for suddenly he rounded and turned to Peters who had stood before us precisely as though he were waiting to hear whether he were to fetch sherry and bitters or tea and toast.

"Find out when he will be in."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now that is more like it," I said as the man withdrew, "and I'll go with you."

He turned again. "No you won't. He would think I had brought a husky along. I'll show him. I'll settle this business myself."

"But see here," I said, sparring for wind. "You know nothing about it. Hadn't you better have a few facts to go on first?"

"You said he took her. Did he or did he not?"

"Yes, but——"

"That's all I need."

"Except a gun."

The shot confused him. Ardently I wished that with chloroform I could dull the confusion into inaction.

Yet the chloroform I lacked, Peters serviceably, if metaphorically, produced.

"The gentleman is not at home, sir."

"Then find out when he will be."

"Yes, sir. I asked, sir. Mr. Austen's man said that Mr. Austen was expected at seven."

Bradish sat down and tapped at his teeth. The chloroform was acting and, in a moment, when the anæsthetist had gone, I took his place.

"It seems unfortunate, but you never can tell. If all of a sudden he marched in here, what could you do, what could you say? You could only shout, 'Where's my wife?' and have him shout, 'What do you mean?' There you would be. You couldn't tell him. You don't know. Don't you have any tea in the house? I have been at it for you all night and all day. I am starving and you lack the decency to offer me a crust. What a curse it is to have a friend like you."

He muttered and moved. Anæsthesia was not com-

plete. But confusion was departing. The assassin was slinking away. Presently the normal being would return. Even then he was showing his head.

He touched a bell. "Tea!"

When presently it came, he drank two cups, with a drop of brandy in them. I was glad to see him at it. Tea clarifies, brandy strengthens, and force, though not too much of it, and sense, though not too much of that either, was what he needed most.

He put down the cup. "Suppose you tell me."

At that, I outlined Aly's grand act on the triple psychic trapeze, omitting only the Stygian kiss which she had beheld there. The rest I gave him. The feat itself, the palpitant gyrations, may, or may not, have surprised him. He said nothing on the subject, nor, in regard to the abduction, did he say—and I thought it singularly heroic of him—that he had always suspected it. Quite the contrary. His first comment was that he had thought of everything but that.

His second comment seemed to me less commendable.

"Nelly was the lady of the steps. It was she whom Brevoort saw and to whom Miss Bolton spoke. She has taken her mother's name."

"But see here——" I began.

He checked me. "Do drop all that. It is the old song. I am sick of it, sick and tired of it and the variations. You were about to tell me she is dead. She is not dead. She is alive. I knew it from the start."

"But see here," I again began, renewing to him the objections to any such possibility which I had advanced to Aly at the manor.

He treated them like cobwebs. "That is not the point. The point is where did he hide her? Where has he been hiding her ever since?"

"You will have to ask him. But I doubt that she is hidden. The lady of the steps was not hidden, Brevoort's lady of the shop could come and go and Miss Fellowes had the freedom of the city. Then also Miss Fellowes had a man in tow, an old man. If Austen had her hidden she would not be about, nor would she be roaming the streets with any man, young or old. Besides this Miss Fellowes is probably alive, whereas——"

Impatiently Bradish shoved at his cup. "There you go again. But no matter. I'll know tonight."

"Yes, but softly does it. The stupidest thing you can do is to make a row."

"Ah, there at last you are right! When I first heard of the abduction, there might have been one, there would have been one, there could not have been anything else. But there will be none now. All the same, I'll make him disgorge."

That was reasonable enough. Anæsthesia had had its proper effect. I could safely leave him and, as I had troubles of my own, I got up to go.

He motioned at me. "I don't know but that——"

It broke off. In a moment he put it together again.

"See here. I don't care a tinker's curse what Austen thinks. This is a ticklish business. I may need a witness."

I sat down again.

"All right. Here he is. I'll go you. I wanted to from the start."

He looked at his watch.

"I can't sit here and twirl my thumbs. Suppose we start now. If he isn't in, we can camp on his doorstep."

I jumped up.

"Comeonski."

XXVII

AT the house where, long since, before anything at all had happened, Austen had buttonholed me, I led the way up the stair to the floor where he lived and on which, facing the head of the stair, were two parallel flats.

Uncertainly before them I hesitated. Was Austen's the one on the left or at the right? In the one which was not his I had, on that remote visit, seen a scrub-woman. She may have eloped. She was no longer there. Both doors were closed. Moreover dusk had come. The landing was dark. If there were names on the doors, the names were invisible.

I turned to Bradish. "I don't know which is his."

He shoved me aside. "Potluck then."

Already he was feeling for the button. Whether he found it or not I do not know. Yet, instantly, the door swung back. There, his hat on, a stick in one hand, the other still on the knob, was the abductor.

From behind, a light in the hall showed Bradish's face without showing Austen's and whether he were surprised or not I could not tell. I am sure though he must have been. In any case, he did not betray it. He had himself in hand at once and devilish cool he was about it.

"Hello! Was it you that telephoned?"

That was his greeting, offhand as you please. But even as he spoke, Bradish was speaking to him.

"I want a word with you."

Austen stood aside. "How de do, Poole? Come in. That room there, if you don't mind."

Bradish went on. As I followed I saw a head poked suddenly through a doorway farther down the hall. It was Austen's gnome I thought. But now we were all in the sitting-room where I had been before. Apparently, nothing had happened to it. It had the same careless air. On the sideboard were decanters. On the table was the drooping green cover. As before, the cupboard door stood open.

Austen closed it. He had entered with us and, after closing the cupboard, indicated the decanters.

"Have a drink?"

Bradish took off his hat.

"Austen, where is my wife?"

Austen motioned.

"Do sit down."

I did. Bradish remained standing. He stood on one side of the table, Austen at the other. On the table was an ivory paper-cutter. Austen reached for it and said:

"I don't know why you ask me that."

Bradish pulled at his gloves. "You know perfectly and I will thank you to tell me."

Austen looked at the ivory knife, then at me. From me he looked at Bradish.

"Your wife is dead."

Bradish had removed a glove. He struck the table with it.

"See here, I have reason to believe that after the funeral you entered the vault and abducted her."

Austen threw down the knife and turned again to me. It was as though he were saying: "You hear that! He's crazy."

Bradish may have so interpreted it. Resting one hand on the table, he leaned forward.

"I propose to get at the bottom of this. I don't mean to be more disagreeable than I can help, but——"

Austen interrupted. "You needn't apologise. Besides, the only place I know where you can get the information you ask is the bureau of vital statistics."

Impatiently Bradish straightened.

"That has nothing to do with it."

Austen smiled, or affected to smile. "Come now. You ought to see that it has everything to do with it. If you take a look, you will find there, entered and filed, the certificate of your wife's decease."

Bradish flushed. I could see he was trying to hold in and I could see too he was having a job of it.

"I don't want that. What I want is to know what became of her after you abducted her."

Austen took up the paper-cutter again. I thought he was stumped but he wasn't.

"Whom do you mean by her?" he surprisingly asked. For the first time Bradish raised his voice.

"Here! Don't quibble. You know I mean my wife."

Austen made a pass with the knife.

"It is hardly a quibble to repeat that she is dead."

Bradish was looking him straight in the eyes, he was looking straight at Bradish and he added:

"I can tell you nothing else."

At that Bradish sort of nodded. "Very good then. If you won't answer me as man to man, you will answer me as defendant to plaintiff."

Austen raised his eyebrows. Perhaps he did not understand. I am sure that I did not.

"You may not know it," Bradish continued, "but I have leased the manor. The vault is my property and you effected a felonious entry into it."

It was a false move. A threat is always that. Besides how was any action possible? The jury were yet to be born that would accept Aly's story. At once I started to interrupt but, before I could, Austen was shrugging his shoulders.

"The sooner I have your complaint, the sooner you will have my answer."

Bradish put on his hat. "Is that your last word?"

Austen turned to me.

"Can't you help a bit, Poole? You were at the funeral. You saw Mrs. Bradish in her coffin."

"Yes," I answered, "but I have seen her since, or at least——"

I was about to qualify it and say if I had not seen her I had seen her ghost, instead of which I screamed. I saw something else and, at what I saw, it may be that my hair stood on end for I could feel my flesh creep.

There, before me, before Bradish, but not before Austen whose back was turned, was Nelly Chilton.

I say Nelly Chilton. It was she or her ghost. The door of the cupboard had opened and there she stood.

A second only. Clothed sepulchrally in white, instantly she vanished.

In screaming, I jumped and so violently that I overturned the chair. Stupidly, I stopped to raise it. It took but a moment, yet as I started and screamed, Bradish cleared the table, swung himself clear over it and dashed into the cupboard in which she—or it—had disappeared.

I had just a glimpse of Austen turning and looking amazedly after him. He had not seen the phantom but I had and, with no conscious motive, yet propelled, I now think, by sheer nervous excitement, I bolted, flung myself in the cupboard.

There was no one there!

I heard, or thought I heard something, the sound of an object that had fallen, but I was too rattled to locate it, too confused to be sure.

On either side coats were hanging. At the back there were more, but of Bradish not a sign, of the phantom, not a trace. Save for myself and the hanging garments in which feverishly I felt, save too for the ceiling and floor, save these things and myself, the cupboard was empty. There was no one. Together the quick and the dead had gone.

My forehead was wet, my hands were moist. I got out my handkerchief and reentered the room.

That also was empty.

"Well," I nervously mumbled, "I'll be damned!"

XXVIII

ON the table was the paper-cutter. It was not very helpful and I got down and looked under the table. For all I found I might as well have looked out of the window. Besides it was a bit awkward. While I

was still on my knees and before I could rise, the door, not of the cupboard but of the room, opened and Austen's man came in.

"I am taking a walk," I told him.

"Exactly, sir."

He spoke as though crawling about on all fours was perfectly natural and I stood up.

"I was looking for Mr. Austen. I will thank you to tell him I am still here."

Civilly he considered me.

"I will see, sir, but I think Mr. Austen just went out."

"Out!" I repeated.

But he too had gone.

I sat down and tried to pull myself together. In spite of the ease with which I had invented a promenade, I was unstrung, nervous as a witch, dripping with perspiration, and, as I raised my hand to wipe my face, it did what no hand of mine had ever done, it shook.

I got up, went to the sideboard, helped myself from a decanter, spilling a little of the contents, and heard the glass click against my teeth.

This won't do, I reflected.

To steady my nerves, I evolved a few platitudes, among others that, if I had seen a ghost, I ought to applaud my luck instead of being alarmed by it.

The comfort of that was mediocre. For, admitting the ghost, what had become of Bradish? His dematerialisation was a phenomenon for which nothing in occultism had prepared me. I was necessarily aware, as everyone else is, that, by virtue of certain austerities, an adept can disentangle himself from the body

and swim into the astral, but, even so, he has to leave his body behind and, so far as I could discover, Bradish had not left so much as his hat. On the other hand there are, or there used to be, stories of people that had the gift of becoming invisible. But the precedent helped me no more than the paper-cutter. Bradish had no such gift.

I peered at the cupboard. For all I knew to the contrary there might be some power there, a power of which I had never heard, some force unimaginable and inexplicable that had whisked him away. But whisked him where? It would have to land him somewhere. It could not gobble him up.

These platitudes, however long in the telling, came at me in flashes. They occupied but a moment and in peering at the cupboard I approached it and reached in a tentative hand, bracing myself to snatch it back at any snatching forward. Then, conscious presently that it was unmolested, that there was no attempt to whisk me, I put a foot in.

Except for such light as came from the window behind me, it was dark and I lit a match. I could see then that on either side were wooden bars from which, on hangers, the coats hung. At the back there were hooks and more coats. As for the floor, I could feel it. It was unyielding as rock. I looked up. The ceiling, obviously there, was out of reach. Then the match burned my fingers. I dropped it and felt behind the coats, not to find Bradish, I knew he was not there, but with some imbecile idea of testifying afterward that I had done so.

By this time I was relatively collected, reasonably cool, yet conscious of an odd feeling in my head. It

was as though a little top were spinning there. With that consciousness, memory raised a latch. I was back in Mayfair, where a woman was telling me of some friend, a typical Englishman who, for a bet, had passed the night in a house said to be haunted, and who, the next morning, was taken from it raving mad. Then at once logic raised another latch. I realised that for that Englishman to go mad he must have been confronted by some unimaginable horror. Confronting me were coats. The deduction followed. Nothing very horrifying there. On the other hand there was something so baffling that it amounted nearly to the same thing and in view of that top I wondered if my brain was about to tip. Before it could, I jumped. I jumped as a cat does at the unexpected. I had heard somebody, or something, and in jumping I wheeled. Another awkward moment. There again was that gnome.

"I was looking for Mr. Bradish," I told him.

"Exactly, sir."

On this occasion he spoke as though his master's friends invariably played hide and seek whenever they came to see him.

"Where is he?" I added.

Respectfully he considered me. "Where is who, sir?"

"Mr. Bradish?"

"I don't think I know the gentleman, sir."

"You were in the hall when I came in here with Mr. Austen, weren't you?"

"In the hall, yes, sir."

"There was nother man with us. That was Mr. Bradish. Have you any idea where he is?"

He wiped his civil mouth. "Excuse me, sir, I didn't see any other gentleman."

I had abandoned the cupboard. I was standing by the table and I had taken up the paper-cutter which I was trying to use as a fan. But at that I dropped it.

"Look here," I said. "I am speaking of a man who came in here a few minutes ago with Mr. Austen and myself. Mr. Austen opened the door for us. You must have seen him."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Austen was going out."

"I am not speaking of Mr. Austen. I am speaking of the man who came in with me. You saw him."

"I can't rightly say I did, sir."

"But you saw me come in?"

"Yes, sir. I saw you, sir. You are the gentleman that was under the table."

"Then do you mean to stand there and tell me that apart from Mr. Austen and myself, you saw no one come in?"

"Yes, sir; no, sir."

I snapped at him, "What do you mean by no, sir; yes, sir?"

But his civility remained unaffected.

"I don't mean nothing, sir. You asked me about another gentleman. I didn't see no other gentleman."

He is an idiot, I hopelessly decided. But at once, catching myself up, I smiled at him.

"Have you ever seen a—er—a ghost here?"

He backed. His mouth twitched. But he was still civil.

"Will you be waiting for Mr. Austen, sir?" In backing, he turned. At the door he turned again.

"If you don't mind, sir, I have work to do."

The hall took him. Once more I was alone in this room in which a vision had appeared and a mortal had disintegrated, a room from which, in fear of me, a gnome had fled.

I sat down. That top must have doubled itself. It seemed to me that two of them were spinning just beneath the pineal gland. Joined to that was the sensation which one has after a white night, the sensation that the brain won't act. I told myself that I if could put my head under a shower, it would help. But I did not want to go ferreting about for the bathroom. I knew the gnome would find me at it and, however accustomed he might be to the vagaries of Austen's guests, few of them I imagined could come there to bathe. None the less I rather fancied that if when stripped and in the tub I had told him I was expecting my grandmother, his "Exactly, sir" would be as prompt and as civil as before.

At the picture, nervously I laughed. I had laughed at nothing and what better reason can one have? Then again I laughed, this time at the little gnome for running away. He must have thought me cracked, that is if he thought at all. But perhaps I am, I immediately reflected. Perhaps everything that has occurred has only seemed to occur. Even so, I told myself, people are not mad because they see things that do not exist, they are only mad if they believe in them and I won't. Yet how vain that resolution was! I could not make myself believe that Bradish had not come with me. I could not pretend that I had not seen him disappear. The vision that had evaporated with him might be a phantom and I was willing to let it go at that. But

there was nothing phantasmal about Bradish. None the less the gnome had not seen him at all!

But that is impossible. I told myself. Either he lied or Austen coached him or——

My mind shot back. I reconstructed our entry. Bradish, lordly as usual, had marched in first. I had followed. In following I had seen the servant's head poked from a doorway farther down the hall. Probably, a moment earlier, he had seen his master about to leave. Then, hearing voices, he had looked out again, but not until Bradish had entered this room.

This is it, I reflected, but, I had to ask myself, what did it matter? The complex problem remained. How and where had Bradish gone?

Clearly he was not under the table, or secreted in the cupboard, and I wondered whether he could have levitated himself through the ceiling. There was a medium — whom Browning threw rhymes at — who could perform that little trick, or at all events something similar. But, I had to realise, Bradish was no more capable of anything of the kind than he was of composing a ballet. Even otherwise, what object could he have had? He had come with me to this shop, solely that he might bully Austen. In that he had failed, or been about to fail, when he flung himself over the table and jumped into the fourth dimension.

What kind of behavior was that? Patently, it had amazed Austen, as well it might, and the memory of it so angered me that if, at that moment, Bradish had popped back, I would have up and struck him.

No such luck, however, and for the time being at any rate, no possibility of it.

As that conclusion reached me, a query followed. If there were no chance of his popping then, when would he pop and would he ever? Had he definitely deserted this world?

"But that is madness!" I exclaimed aloud.

At once, to put an accent on it, if one were needed, I saw that gnome peering in at me from the door. A moment only. The door closed. More frightened perhaps than before, again the harmless wretch had fled.

I could not blame him. First he had found me on all fours; afterward in the cupboard. On the first occasion I told him I was taking a walk. On the second, I had insisted he had seen what he had not seen and I had enquired about a ghost. Now, a moment since, he had heard me talking to myself, talking of the madness which he must have suspected. Instantly, I could hear the clanging ambulance, feel the strait-jacket, see the psychopathic ward!

Unstrung as I was, it alarmed me. I sprang up, grabbed my hat and stick and with the idea of doing something, of going somewhere, of enlisting somebody's aid, I hurried on and out and down the stair to the street where, comfortably, Fletcher waited.

I had forgotten him utterly and said as much.

"Thank heaven you are here! Have you seen Mr. Bradish?"

He touched his cap. "Why no, sir. Not since he went in with you."

"You are sure he hasn't come out?"

"Positive, sir."

"Fletcher, look here. He has disappeared."

His eyes bulged. "Mr. Bradish has?"

"We went in to see a man and while Mr. Bradish was talking to him all of a sudden he wasn't there. I don't know what to do."

Fletcher's eyes bulged wider. But any hypothesis save one, that I was drunk, was clearly beyond him. I saw it and motioned.

"Here, let's go to Dr. Cally. He may tell us how to act."

On the way, I thought of Aly and wondered whether what she had seen, or thought she had seen, were true, feeling, as I wondered, that it were better if it was not; though better still, better far it would be if, when Bradish entered the vault, he had found his bride there, found her lover with her, found him dead, found her dead, found them dead together, and when, ragingly, he had tried to tear them apart, they had crumbled to dust before him. A climax such as that would, it seemed to me, be more fatefully poetic than the melodrama which Aly had related.

But now we were at Cally's, who, it appeared, was out. It was that nigger of his who told me and surly enough he was about it. He did not know where Dr. Cally was, he knew nothing and he looked ready and eager to slam the door in my face.

Fortunately, I know just how to tame a brute of that kind and, quick as a wink, I pulled a roll of bills straight at him.

"Throw out your hand."

The effect was magical. Instantly a sullen lout became all teeth and eyes. In his erebean face I could even detect gleams of intelligence.

"Find him. Tell him it is a matter of life and death. I will be at the Buck Club."

Confident then, that unless Cally had also evaporated, he would shortly materialise, I flew down the steps, hopped in the car and told Fletcher to drive to the club where, when presently I entered it, I ran around like a chicken with its head off.

In the main room I saw no one to whom I could turn and, leaving it, I did what I rarely do, I looked in my letter box. There was a chance, slim enough in all conscience, yet still a chance that from some recondite region, Bradish might be trying to communicate with me.

The box was tolerably stuffed, but mainly with circulars from among which I sifted two letters, one of which contained a request for my autograph. I dropped it. Immediately a boy in a slashed waistcoat sprang from nowhere, picked it up and gave it back to me. I dropped it again and put my foot on it. The other letter was from my publishers who said that five thousand was offered for the picture rights of my last iniquity and would I see them about it?

Mere starvation wages, I thought and thought no more about it, for the time being that is, and hurried on through the billiard room to the bar where there were two men whose names I might have remembered but whose faces were blanks.

One of them had the agreeable air of having just stepped from a bandbox. He invited me to drink.

I ordered vichy.

The other man, who reeked of polo, addressed me in a throaty voice.

"Whatcher up to now, Poole? Writin' somethin' noo?"

I barked at him. "Writing something? I am living

something, something that would bowl you over, bore holes in you and stuff you full of nightmare. Do you know Bradish?"

"The spider chap? What of him?"

I gulped the vichy. "He was with me one moment and vanished the next. Is Brevoort here?"

Lightly, with a forefinger, the other man motioned.

"There's a boy trying to speak to you."

I looked about. The slashed waistcoat had approached.

"Dr. Kelly, sir. He's in the hall."

Without one of the amenities of life, I abandoned those men and hurried on and out to where Cally stood.

He plucked at his beard. "You've been corrupting my servant. He says you gave him thirty dollars."

"See here! Bradish has disappeared. You and I have got to find him."

He adjusted his glasses. "Disappearances are deceptive. How did it happen?"

"I went with him to call on a man and, while there, a ghost appeared and Bradish jumped into the fourth dimension."

"Where did these commonplace incidents occur?"

"At Austen's."

"Was Bradish acquainted with the ghost?"

"It was Nelly Chilton's."

Mephistophelianly he eyed me, not as though he were questioning my sanity, but rather as though he had always thought me demented.

"You saw it too then? Where did it come from?"

"A cupboard, and look here, no sooner did it ap-

pear than it disappeared and Bradish disappeared also."

"In the cupboard?"

"Didn't you hear me? I dashed in there the next instant. There was nobody there, nobody, nothing, coats only."

He lit one of his vile cigars.

"Poole, always I have admired you. But never before have you been as brilliant. Personally, fool that I am, I have regarded the fourth dimension as an example of mathematical hysterics. But to you it is a cupboard full of old clothes. That is what I call originality. Now——"

I grabbed him by the arm. "Stow all that. We have got to get back there and——"

He shook me off. "If you take my advice, you will leave things as they are."

I could have torn my hair, torn his. Again I grabbed him.

"I don't want your advice. If I had elephantiasis I wouldn't take it. I want your help."

"Why don't you knock me down?"

He said it with a hateful affection of patience, the resigned patience of the long suffering, and it infuriated me.

"I'll be shot if I don't, if you won't come along."

"A lamb led by a lion," I heard him protest at the doorkeeper who regarded us both with professional stolidity.

But at last I had him in the car and after directing Fletcher, I went over it again, but this time in full.

"What do you make of it?" I concluded. "To me it is a nightmare."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes.

"Well, I can't. Your nightmare is a mare's nest."

"How a mare's nest?"

"You are a novelist, I believe."

"You mean I have invented all this?"

"No, that would require ability. You have merely twisted things crooked and then frightened yourself with them."

"Yes," I admitted. "That is only commonsense. The whole affair has rattled me so that I can't think straight."

"Totally unnecessary to tell me that, Poole. Moreover, if I were you, I wouldn't talk of commonsense. It might seem boastful."

I found no adequate retort. Besides, what he said was natural enough. He did not believe me. How could he? How could anyone believe my cock-and-bull story? How for that matter could I prove it? I had no witness except Austen, who might deny everything, and that gnome who had not seen Bradish at all.

But now the car was veering. Into the street of obscure calamities it swam and, at the Leah-like house, we alighted.

XXIX

IN the hall, on the way up, Cally looked at his watch and blandly, with his abominable unconcern, remarked that he had an appointment at nine.

"At nine!" I exclaimed. "It must be midnight now."

"Two minutes after eight precisely."

I stared. It was my turn. I did not believe him. It was incredible that all that had happened could have been comprised into an hour's space.

"Seeing more ghosts?" he obligingly enquired.

But now we were on the landing above. It was darker than before, yet, without apparent effort, he found the button.

The gnome opened. Cally said something, asking for Austen I think, and I went on with him into the sitting-room where the evaporation had occurred.

Previously, it had not been lighted. It was then and Cally indicated the cupboard of which the door had been closed.

"Is that your fourth dimension?"

Suddenly I felt very tired. Joined to the fatigue was a sense of helplessness. I felt that Cally would be of no use whatever and I cursed myself for not having thought to subvention Aly. She could have psychometrised the cupboard and told me what happened when Bradish disappeared.

From the chair on which I had dropped, I looked about. Cally had opened the cupboard and I saw him go in. Then I lost sight of him and I wondered—though with that indifference which lassitude brings—whether he too had been whisked away.

Yet almost at once he showed himself and beckoned. I got up and went to him. Preceding me, he re-entered the cupboard and pushed at the back. Silently it parted. An unimagined door had opened. I was looking into another room.

A foot or two beyond was a trunk and beside it a hat. I saw that, saw too something else. Across the room was another door. As I looked it also opened.

From behind it a face, ageless and sexless, peered and I heard a sexless and ageless voice.

"In Christian charity, will you go?"

But the voice, however unearthly, was human. The room into which I looked was real. Then at once I was in darkness. Cally had withdrawn his hand. Instantly the cupboard's back exit had closed and I realised how it was that when Bradish dashed in there, I had missed him by not more than a hair.

"There is your fourth dimension. Take a jump in yourself. If you don't find Bradish, it is because he has gone. I am going too. Some folks have their living to make."

It was Cally of course. I had no answer for him, nor any surprise at his familiarity with the lay of the land. I took it that he had stumbled on it by accident, as I might have, if I had been less rattled when Bradish disappeared. Then, at once, with a push of my own, I passed through.

At the right was a sofa, behind it a window. Opposite the sofa, a yard or two away, was a table. On it was a book and above it a light. Nearby were two chairs. Save for a small rug, that trunk and the hat, the floor was bare. These things I absorbed at a glance. What alone among them detained me was the sofa.

There sat Bradish. He was holding his leg as though it were a guitar.

The attitude exasperated me. If a last straw were needed there it was and I yelled.

"What are you doing?"

He motioned at the opposite wall. "Nelly is in there. I would have had her, I nearly had her, she

was just ahead of me, making for that door, when I tripped and fell."

It was too much and I let go.

"You are always tumbling over yourself and always at the wrong moment. It is a pity you did not break your neck."

He grimaced. "I nearly did. I fell over that trunk and twisted my bad ankle. The pain must have knocked me. When I came to, I was on the floor."

I gave it to him again.

"I thought you were dead, confound you. When I saw what you saw, I sprang in the air and screamed like an octopus, but you dashed in here and fainted from sheer bravado. Come along out of this."

"Not till I see Nelly."

"You intend to stay here for the rest of your born days?"

"I intend to get at Nelly if I have to break down every door in the place."

"Nice blackguardly program."

He threw out his chin. "Kid gloves, eh? I have worn them too long."

As he spoke, he lowered his leg, got to his feet, winced visibly and as visibly stared, not at me, at something or someone behind me.

I turned. In the doorway, through which that unearthly face had peered, stood a man whom I remembered having seen at the funeral. Obviously a man of the world and not of its neighbourhood, as some worldly men are, he had that air of extreme distinction which certain New Yorkers used to possess and which now is gone forever. Another lost art.

He bowed to Bradish. "My name is Chilton. He

turned to me. "Mr. Poole, I believe. Won't you both be seated?"

There could be but one Chilton—Nelly's father. There he stood. Bradish sank back on the sofa. I took a chair. There were but two chairs. He took the other.

"Mr. Bradish," he resumed. "It was my intention to call on you tomorrow, for in returning here, I hardly expected to find you. Austen, who went in search of me, told me of your visit. He told me also what you said. In what manner you discovered what you did discover is incomprehensible. It is also unfortunate. He paused and continued: "What I have to say to you intimately concerns my daughter."

I made for the door. "Mr. Chilton, I am your very obedient servant."

At once he protested. "No, no, I beg of you. Please do not go. At least for a moment. I——"

"Your daughter," Bradish heatedly cut in, "is in the next room. She——"

"My daughter is dead," the old man interrupted.

At that the lion roared. "She isn't! She can't be! She never has been! I don't believe it. I've seen her."

Cheerlessly the old man eyed him. "When you saw her she told you she was dead. She spoke the truth. Civilly she has no existence."

"What do you mean, sir?" Bradish cried at him.

The old man's right hand had been ungloved. Slowly he removed the other glove.

"What the law is here I do not know, but I do know that on the Continent a death certificate, properly entered, is incapable of revision."

The spider then seemed to be digging into Bradish's face.

"It cannot be that you propose to stand on that?"

The old man turned to me. "I stand on nothing." He turned to Bradish. "None the less——"

"What?"

"I ask you to relinquish her."

Bradish glared. The expression is cheap. I can think of none other that is as adequate.

"Not to her lover!" The five syllables he tore from his mouth and flung them so violently that the spider seemed about to fling itself with them. Nor had he done. With the same violence he gestured at the cupboard. "In that room in there I surprised her going to him."

But the violence served only to heighten that air of distinction.

"Mr. Bradish, no man should speak, as you have spoken, to a girl's father. Yet I do not venture to reprove you. Presently you will reprove yourself. Meanwhile you will allow me to correct you. When you surprised my daughter in the adjoining room, it was in search of me she was going. Since Austen first took this apartment for me, very often I have sat there, usually with him, but also with Dr. Cally, who has been attending her."

And that, I reflected, is how tricky little Cally knew the lay of the land.

"As Dr. Cally is aware, though you are not, she is dying. The dying, Mr. Bradish, do not act in the manner which you have asserted."

Again the wounded lion roared.

"Dying! It is impossible. Only a while ago, she——"

Protestingly the old man had motioned. "I must ask you to hear me. For some time I was abroad. It was only a few days before my daughter's marriage that I returned to this country. She was then interested in Austen as she always had been. To my knowledge she had never looked, as the phrase is, at another man. Her marriage to you was therefore a surprise to me. She has since told me that her mother so represented matters with which you are familiar, that she had no other recourse. Mr. Poole, will you care to smoke?"

In speaking he produced a cigarette case, which he offered to me, offered to Bradish, who shook his head. I thanked him and took one. He also took one and resumed.

"You will appreciate in a moment why I enter into circumstances which, without reflecting in any way on you, are painful to us both. But then the whole matter is painful, far more so than you know. Have you a match, Mr. Poole?"

I struck one which I gave him. He thanked me, lighted his cigarette and motioned at Bradish.

"I love Nelly. She is the one human being I do love. A sacrifice for her would not be a sacrifice, it would be a joy. I can make none. There is none to be made. You ask if I proposed to stand on the death certificate. I can only stand and look on, stand and wring my hands."

The gloves which he held he dropped, bent over and recovered them.

"Mr. Bradish, you married a girl whom you have

lost through no fault of yours, through no fault of hers. Be good enough to keep that in mind. But you have lost her as I have, as we all have, for we have lost her forever."

Then again the wounded lion roared.

"It is preposterous! I don't believe it!"

The atmosphere was stifling. Charged with grief, with anger, with suspense, it had us all by the throat. I was about to go and throw open the window, but the old man was speaking.

"Civilly she is dead and nominally——"

He broke off. For a moment, resolutely he closed his mouth. Then at once, with a gesture of excuse, he looked at Bradish.

"I again ask you to relinquish her."

Again Bradish flung it at him. "And I repeat, I will not relinquish my wife to her lover."

Mr. Chilton looked at me and though years have gone by since then, that look seems to me still the most despairful that I ever saw. But precisely as he had mastered himself a moment earlier, he mastered himself then. The air of extreme distinction returned and it was actually with a smile, the smile of a man of the world to whom nothing is important, that he turned anew to Bradish.

"I fear you will have to relinquish her to her lover, for her lover is Christ."

Even then I did not get it. Nor did Bradish. He blazed.

"Either you are insane, sir, or I am."

"No, not that," the old man still with that smile replied. "But you are wretched and angry and I am wretched and sad. Let me tell you. During the

funeral, my daughter's consciousness returned. But with that consciousness was another, perhaps the most pitiful and perhaps, too, the most horrible that a mortal can experience. She heard the service, smelt the tuberose, knew where she was, knew that she was assisting at her own funeral and she could not speak, she could not stir. Catalepsy in paralysing the nerve centres had made her rigid. She was unable to move an eyelid. Perhaps you can imagine how she felt. I do not want to."

The smile had gone. Cheerlessly he continued.

"That night, as you have since discovered, Austen rescued her. But the rescue itself was entirely fortuitous. He had previously arranged that the coffin should not be closed and that arrangement, which had in view a last visit to her, was merely one of sentiment. But when he saw her, when he touched her, it seemed to him that she could not be dead and he brought her to me here and sent for Dr. Cally."

"Yes," I said, and I said it only for the sake of saying something. "Cally told me of a case of catalepsy. He did not tell me whose."

"We begged him not to. Meanwhile, after he had revived her, she said she saw the light. She——"

He broke off. Again the room was being invaded, this time by Austen, who nodded at us and seated himself on the trunk.

The old man glanced at him, turned, straightened and looked at Bradish, and what a look!

"Legally my daughter is dead. Nominally she is dying. A Sister of Mercy is with her now."

The face in the doorway, I thought.

With that look, he was adding: "Yesterday my

daughter was received in the Catholic Church. Shortly, so far as the world is concerned, she will be buried from us all. Will you say, for your saying it may give her an added peace, will you say you relinquish her now before she begins the novitiate that ends with the veil?"

It was too suffocating. On the table at my elbow was a book, a breviary as I then discovered. But the lines were blurred. I could not see them. What I did see was that girl, the cited beauty, bidding farewell to love, to life; taking the black veil which is a white shroud. The picture was the most desolate I had ever seen. Yet, at once, beneath it, those words, which are so curiously radiant, shimmered like thin flames: "Behold, I make all things new!"

For her, yes; not in this life certainly, but in the next and probably in her lives to follow, all things broken would be made complete and she would find again things vanished.

But for Bradish, what could life hold except the tantalizing torture of knowing her alive and yet dead to him? Again I wondered what sin, enigmatic, anterior, unknown, could have thrust him in those halls where expiation would walk ever at his side, sit with him when he sat and, in sleep, lie with him when sleep he could.

I turned to look at him. He was no longer where he had been. He had gone to the window where he stood, his back turned, looking out, but at what? What did he see there? It must have been something very penetrant for in a moment, when he turned, the spider that had been digging and tearing at his face had yellowed and the face itself was drawn and grey.

From the night, age may have reached and touched him. Yet also, another presence may have touched not him alone but his soul. So I thought. I was entirely in error. At the moment I did not realise that, only that he was saying something, saying it in a voice that rang.

"All right, I will, and I am glad of the chance."

What on earth did he mean, I wondered. In the interim I had lost the connection. I think the others had also. They were looking at him, as I was, in vague surmise.

But at once and to my disgust he became sententious.

"The world is very narrow."

Martin Tupper, I thought.

Immediately he retrieved himself. "Let the world be her convent."

Where did he get that? I asked myself. It is too good for him.

"I shall ask," he was adding, "that we be divorced."

"You will ask in vain then," I called at him. "Yesterday, as I understood from Mr. Chilton, Mrs. Bradish joined the Church. The Church does not recognise divorce."

Impatiently he gestured. "The Church can grant an annulment."

Austen sprang up, "Bradish——"

"We have been man and wife in name only," he uninterruptedly continued. "In the existing circumstances that might not be enough. But there are antecedent circumstances that will be."

"Bradish——" Austen again began.

"I married her under false pretences."

"Jim!" I protested.

"Not intentionally. I was unaware they were false. But the fact remains that she became my wife because of conditions which she was unaware had ceased to exist; that is, if they ever existed. If only for that I cannot do otherwise than release her. But there is another reason, a personal reason which, when Mr. Chilton entered here, I meant to state but which is superfluous now. As it is she can have the marriage annulled and return, not to death, but to life. I wish her joy."

"Bradish," Austen began anew and this time succeeded in saying it, "it is what I expected of you."

He might, I thought, have said less. But I thought, too, he could not have said more.

Bradish made no reply. He did not even look at him. He ignored him completely and that attitude, it seemed to me—and how erroneously!—was induced neither by jealousy nor callousness, but by that detachment which is part of the higher faith, and a line, less radiant than that other but more beautiful came back to me: "Near to renunciation, very near, dwelleth eternal peace."

"Now, I'll go," he abruptly added.

Mr. Chilton had stood up.

"Goodnight," he rather cavalierly concluded.

I had gone on to the trunk where I got his hat which I gave him and, Mr. Chilton preceding us, we went on to the door of this flat where the old man, as he opened it, bowed gravely.

In the car, Bradish turned to me.

"I will go to Spain with you next week."

"You will go as a grandee then. You have done a noble act."

He twisted his eyebrows at me. "Rubbish! When I came to in that ghastly room I determined to get at that girl if I broke down every door in the place."

"So you said."

"And I meant it. But it was not to carry her off. It was to tell her what I thought of her. I would have told Chilton, told him to tell her, told him when he came in the room, if he had not infuriated me at the very start."

He broke off and angrily continued, "When I keeled over, she never turned, she never stopped. For all of her I might have died there. Afterward, when I sat on that confounded sofa, I realised what must have been unconsciously germinating in me ever since that day in the Park when she said she was dead."

Surprisedly I looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I hate her. It was that that I wanted to say."

Well, after all, it was only natural. His torture had been excessive. The screws had been turned too tight. Besides, hatred is but love reversed.

Before I could say so, up again ran the Spanish flag.

"Yes," I said. "But you will have to loan me Peters for an hour."

That hour never came.

XXX

THE morrow was amazing as every morrow should be, but, in the instance, shuttled with a vast surprise which I, who had promenaded from the unexpected to the unawaited, had entirely omitted to foresee.

The surprise, which battened on me in a lift and

multiplied itself elsewhere, began, after the manner of great events, in a commonplace fashion.

I was on my way to sign the picture contract at my publishers when I ran into Aly. As I had all that had occurred to tell her, I asked her to come with me and go afterward to the sorcerer's for his brews.

But though, good sort that she was, she consented, she did not see her dear Mr. Delmonico that day, while I beheld what is far rarer than any sorcerer, the complex phenomenon of dual personality.

Meanwhile, we had entered the junior partner's office. At the moment, he was elsewhere. But Miss Judson, his secretary, was there, and there also was a lanky young man, the portrait on foot of a greenhorn.

Then, as Aly and I waited, he addressed me, asking whether Broadway were uptown or down, and I was informing him when the junior member entered behind me with a "Ha!"

To which he added, "I see you know Bil Sayers."

The depth of the sanctuary is the place for idols. Invisible, secreted from vulgar eyes, there they should remain. The same may be true of authors. Yet, while I do not recall that I had evolved any particular image of Bil Sayers, I am sure I never imagined he would resemble a lout. I glanced at Aly. She also seemed perplexed. There goes her idol, too, I thought, when another incident occurred.

The junior member was old and stout. The senior member was young and slim. At that moment, his hat on, a cigar in his mouth, in he marched. In all the vanishing acts that prestidigitateurs perform, I have seen nothing more instantaneous than the manner in which that cigar disappeared. No dancing-master

I ever heard of could have been quicker with his hat.

It was not for me of course, nor even for the lanky genius, that these immediate feats of *haute école* were performed. He was not looking at either of us. He was looking at Aly, and a proper tribute to her beauty it was.

But Miss Judson had come to me with the contracts and I went forward to a desk where, with the junior member facing me, I sat down.

"Our London house has particularly requested the autograph. It is for the Queen. I will have a *Dawn* in at once. Miss Judson!"

It was the senior member's voice and Ho! I thought, how tickled the Queen would be if she could see the lovely lad.

Then Aly's voice reached me, though occupied as I at once became with a tortuous clause of the contract, what she said I did not hear, and subconsciously I fancied she must be expressing—yet how far more graciously!—precisely what I thought.

Then I signed and the old junior member told me the cheque would be mailed that night.

The entire transaction had not taken more than a moment or so, but when I got up the young senior member had disappeared, as his cigar had, gone, I took it, for the book. In the window the genius stood on one foot, picking his teeth. I thought the attitude excessive and Aly must have thought so also. She was pink.

Nodding at the junior member, I passed out with her to the hall where, while waiting for the lift, I condoled.

"Sorry I saw him, aren't you?"

At that moment Miss Judson flew up.

"Shall I mail it to you, mem?"

Of all the gentle people I ever met, Aly Bolton is, I think, the gentlest. Yet instantly, for some undividable reason, she assumed the expression of a tigress.

But a descending cage has stopped and into it we got, while Miss Judson called:

"It's for the Queen, mem, did they tell you?"

The steel door slammed. Down we sank.

"What the dickens do you care?" I muttered at her. Pink before, she was pinker then.

Nor could she have heard me, for as we reached the street she said and said it, too, with flashing eyes:

"It is outrageous. They promised no one should know."

Imbecile that I was, not until that moment had it dawned upon me. But in that moment, dawn came, dawn went. It was day. With its full light in my eyes, I blinked. Then I laughed.

"You're a sneaky little thing."

A vagabond cab was passing and I raised my stick.

But no. She did not want to drive. She did not want elixirs. As for the old junior member and the young senior, never would she put her foot in their shop again, while, as for the Queen, well, I was glad Broadway was not Pall Mall.

Never had I seen her angry before. Never have I seen her angry since. Vexed, yes; annoyed also, but angry, no, and I have regretted it. An exquisite girl in a tempest—what more appetising sight would you have?

"And I am not a sneaky little thing," she snapped at me. "And it is none of your business anyway."

I have found it politic to agree with anyone, no matter whom, about anything, no matter what, and I applied that myrrh and cassia.

"Of course it is none of my business. Moreover, decent people never hear anything that was not intended for them. It was sneaky of me to listen. But never mind. Your shameful secret is safe. No one shall know from me that you are the great Bil Sayers. I won't have the chance to tell. I am leaving this part of the planet."

She cocked the seashell of an ear. "What?"

In the tumult of the jostling street, it was not possible to go into it then, nor did I attempt to until we reached her flat where her "Oh! Oh's!" at my account of all that had happened continued until the account was ended when, clapping her hands, she cried:

"Those two will be happy ever after."

That, I think, set the tune.

What I said, what she said, what afterward occurred when the brave, foolish words, Forever, Never, were uttered by us both, all that has nothing to do with the present document except, that in enabling me to build an immediate castle in Spain, it withheld me from the Alhambra.

The fairy castle metamorphosed itself into a Riverside flat.

But that also is irrelevant. What alone imports is Bradish, who accepted my infection with such passivity that I could not but see he thought it better so and preferred to be alone.

That is years ago. For a while he wrote. He wrote from Avignon. He wrote from Vallombrosa. Then his letters ceased. During the war he fought for Italy

and died for her in the Alps. There he was delivered from the sweep and loneliness of things. If the great renunciation did not bring him peace, he found it there. There at last he was free and forever from those halls hung with enigmas, tapestried with tears, before which the sphinx in flight gallops like a jackal.

THE END.

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